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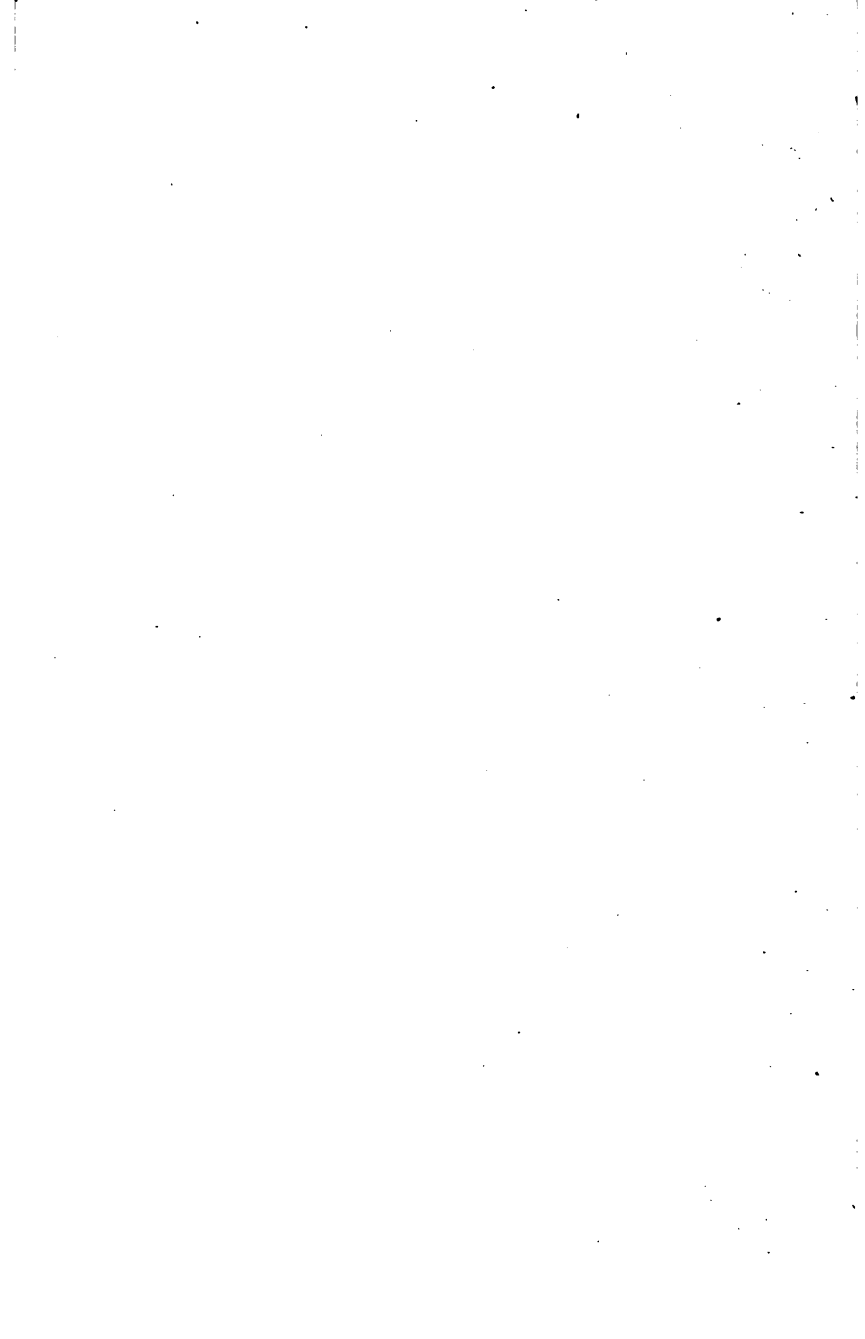
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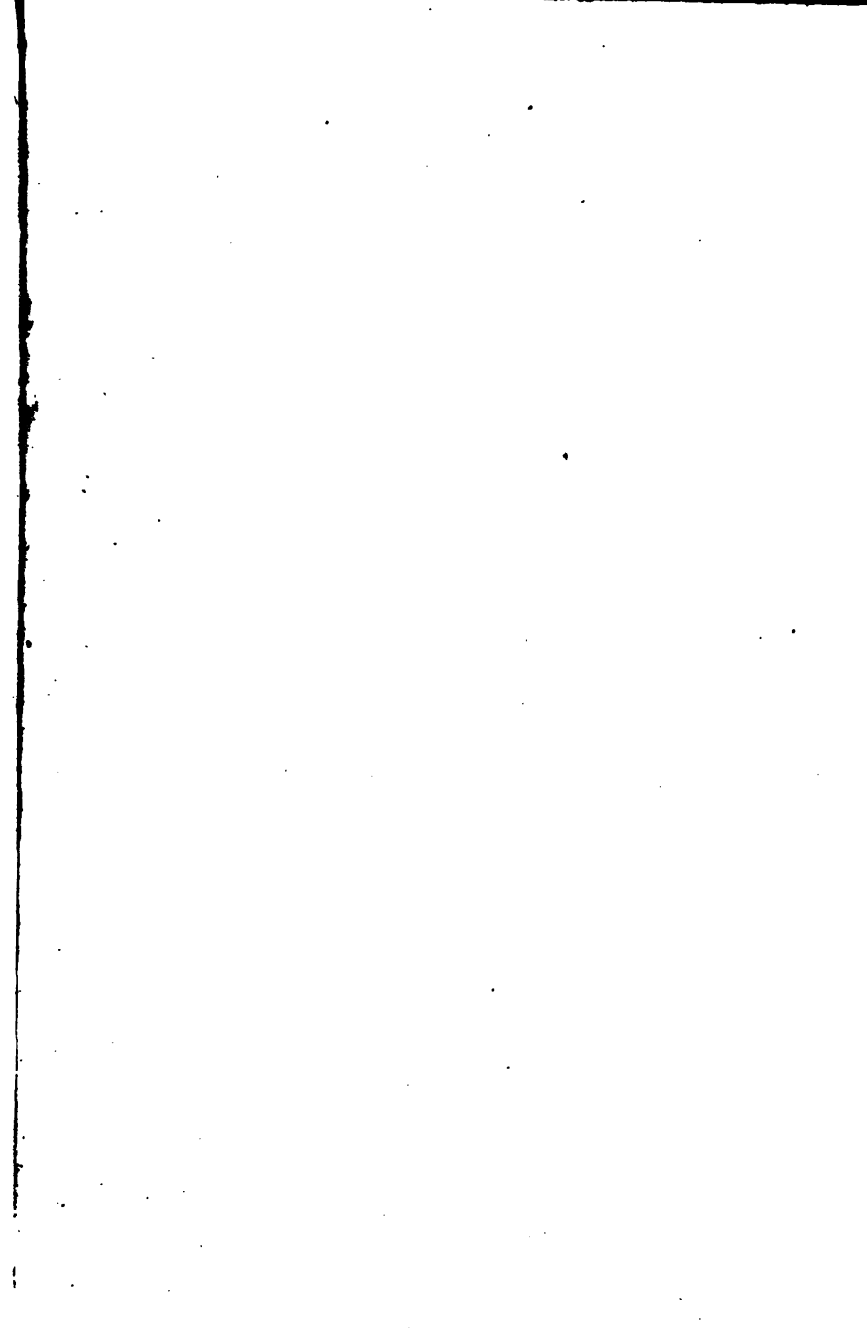


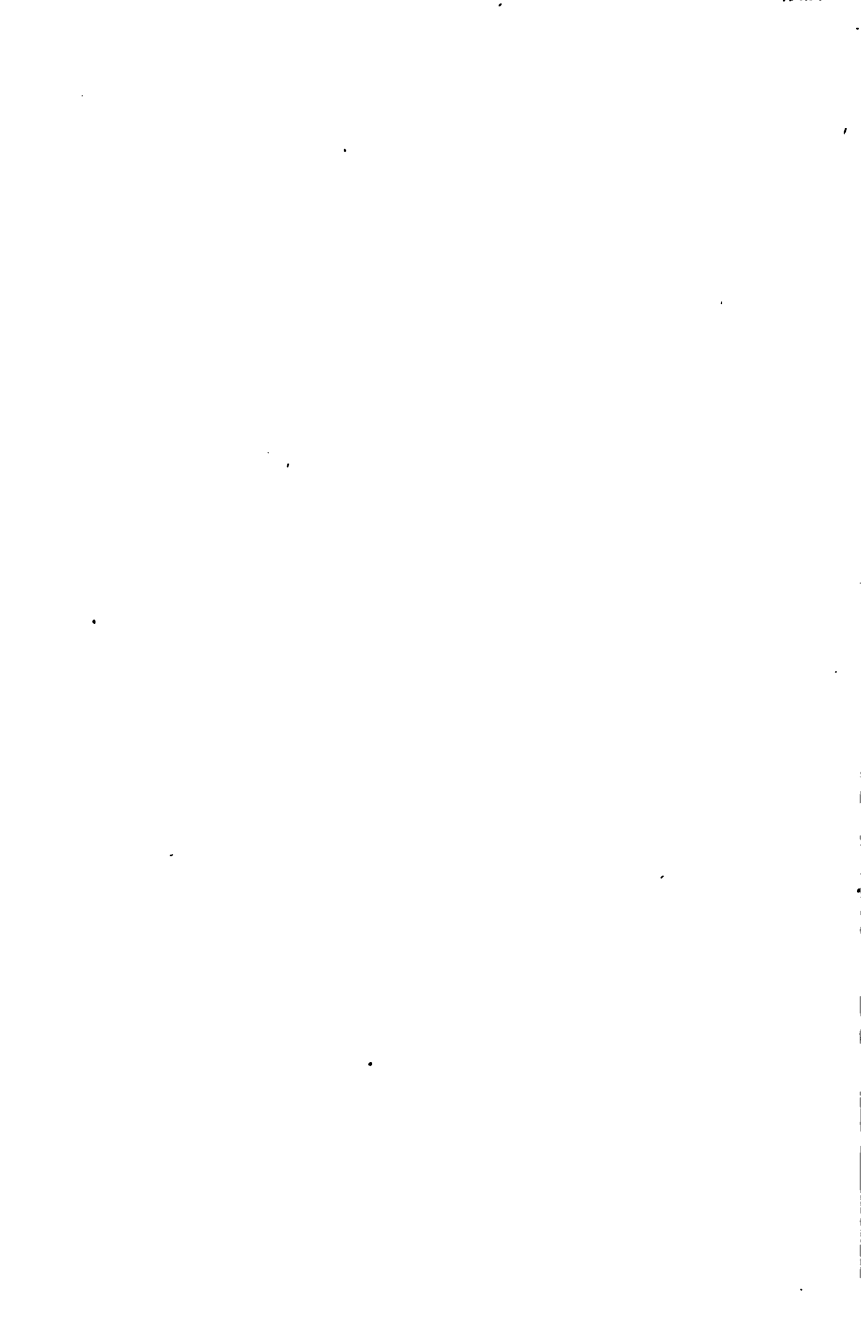
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KILLED AT YPRES NOVEMBER 6, 1917











MYRA GRAY.

VOL. I.

MYRA GRAY;

OR,

SOWN IN TEARS, REAPED IN JOY.

A Novel

BY

CHARLES CARLOS-CLARKE,

AUTHOR OF "CHARLIE THORNHILL," "WHICH IS THE WINNER," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO

THE RIGHT HON. THE
EARL OF STAMFORD AND WARRINGTON,

AS A TRIFLING ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF MANY ACTS OF

KINDNESS SHOWN TO HIS LORDSHIP'S DOMESTIC

CHAPLAIN AND FRIEND,

CHARLES CARLOS-CLARKE.



CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

CHAPTER I.	
MATHILDE'S HOME	PAGE I
CHAPTER II.	
THE IRISH PICNIC	24
CHAPTER III.	
MATHILDE CARRIES OFF HER VICTIM	49
CHAPTER IV.	
MYRA IN HER FOREIGN HOME	65
CHAPTER V.	
A DAME D'HONNEUR OF A GRAND DUCHESS	86
CHAPTER VI.	
A SERPENT ON THE TRAIL.	106
CHAPTER VII.	
PREPARATIONS FOR THE PALACE BALL	122
CHAPTER VIII.	
MATHILDE REFLECTS WHILE OTHERS DANCE	136

CHAPTER IX.	
MYRA'S DANGER AT THE PALACE BALL. GILBERT TO THE	PAGE
RESCUE	154
CHAPTER X.	
SATISFACTORY ARRANGEMENTS	173
CHAPTER XI.	
COMPLETE SATISFACTION FOR THE BARON DE LA FELS .	193
CHAPTER XII.	
LORD FITZCOURTHOPE AT MELTON MOWBRAY	213
CHAPTER XIII.	
A RUN IN THE SHIRES	236
CHAPTER XIV.	
HENRY DELORAINÉ ACCEPTS A RESPONSIBILITY	255
CHAPTER XV.	
THREE ARE COMPANY.	272
CHAPTER XVI.	
LORD FITZCOURTHOPE'S DEATH CAUSES REFLECTIONS IN	
MORE BREASTS THAN ONE	297



MYRA GRAY.

CHAPTER I.

MATHILDE'S HOME.

THERE seems always a difficulty in the commencement of everything; but the stone once set rolling, if it gathers no moss on its way, the difficulty of starting has ceased. It runs on to the bottom of the hill, and if it be worth nothing more when it gets there, it may have flashed a moment's admiration or arrested a passing interest from the beholder on its road.

I have begun this story with a very clear conception, as it seems to me, of the stages through which it has to pass on its road to the catastrophe. Good, bad, or indifferent, once under

weigh, I shall go on. I shall be glad if it amuses; that is the first object of a novel. Works of fiction are sorry means of instruction, and always remind me of the Aristotelian objection to fictitious sorrows—that they spoil our appreciation of the true.

But it does not follow that because instruction, in its first intention, should not be conveyed by a novel, no good is to be derived from its perusal. Examples, which neither men nor women will follow, when set before them in a more peremptory manner, sometimes make an imperceptible impression, conveyed unobtrusively. Precepts, unheeded in dogmatic form, may be acknowledged when presenting themselves in agreeable society, and illustrated by what the dramatists call a “striking situation.” There are many small rivulets of knowledge, ethics, observation, which contribute their quota to the waters of general success; but the great stream into which they ought to be poured is amusement.

To be sure, it is right that the amusement be healthy; and I would no more willingly provide unhealthy food, to cherish morbid fancies and

vicious inclinations, than, if I were a baker, I would sell poisoned bread, and cherish disease or decay. There is poisoned bread and indigestible meat about in abundance, and very short weight somewhere of wholesome food; I do not wish to deprecate criticism, but I hope I shall avoid dealing in the one or the other.

By the way, I ought to say, at starting, that that this is not a "sporting novel." Now, let me give a reason for labelling my plum-pudding with "This is not an apple-tart." Upon one or two occasions I have been so unfortunate as to provoke undeserved hostility in this wise: That the reviewer mistook the title of my book for its material; the outside crust for the inside fruit; and denounced it as horsey, slangy, turf-like, rejoicing in the demi-monde, and given over to delicacies which are no delicacies. I am far from saying this advertisement of its wickedness did nothing for its popularity; but the disappointment awaiting the followers of the *αἰσχρον*, where they find themselves confronting the *κάλον*, if bitter to them, will be no satisfaction to me. Above all, I shall ask to be read before I be condemned.

I doubted for a moment, and in this practical mammon-worshipping world no one should doubt longer, to what epoch to take my reader ; how far back it would be desirable or easy to carry him—or her. I say easy, because there is a constraint in placing before the audience forms dressed in antique garb and disguising thought in obsolete language ; in endeavouring to represent that as stamped with the impression of the mind, which is but a hardly-sustained effort of imagination or memory. Hail to the masters of this art ! they be but few, and it is dangerous to attempt to follow them.

So I made up my mind not to do so. I turned back from the Saxon Gurths, through the Longswords and Percies, the Bothwells and Rochesters, the Stuarts and Georges, after a plunge down the narrow lanes of Herculaneum and through the sands of Palmyra, to the nineteenth century and the pot-hat. I reflected that, after all, humanity is tortured by the same emotions, urged by the same circumstances, led astray by the same temptations, and reserved for the same expiation, whether it be present to us in the slouched hat and slashed doublet

of the seventeenth, or the swallow-tailed respectability of the nineteenth century. The garotter, with his dirty hands and fustian breeches, who looks as if he was intended to be flogged through the world, unless the universal panacea, night-schools and muscular Christianity, should rescue him, is just the same beneath the waistcoat as the dandified Turpins and Duvals; who made as many holes in the women's hearts as in their lords' bodies. They were, believe me, ye juvenile Jack Sheppards of the nineteenth century, sorry rascals for all their lace and silver; roistering blades among the weak and unprotected, ever ready with the pistol against the unarmed and peaceful; and when they were hanged they met with their deserts.

But I reflected further that they had their temptations, and have left some behind to us, to which I, for one, will not be the man to give a helping hand. My villains shall be the villains of the period. The picturesque shall give way to the true. My virtuous heroine shall have the full sympathies of her admirers, by being like them outwardly and inwardly; and nothing of her feelings shall be concealed by the adop-

tion of language or costume which might detract from a sufficient communion between you and her. My puppets here are like my children; and, if I wish them to avoid some of my errors, I still wish them to be something like myself.

I should be sorry to be tied to a twelvemonth; and as this story is not borrowed from the French, of which candid avowal they may say, "So much the worse for the reader," I shall decline to give the exact year when I am about to begin. The heroine is still alive, and of that age of which commoners ought to know nothing. Debrett's revelations are the penalty which power pays to curiosity under an advanced stage of civilisation. Before printing was it paid nothing at all.

But if I am averse to fixing a day, a month, or a year, there are always landmarks enough in modern history to adorn a tale. Shall I say that the new Poor Law had lately passed, that a relaxation of the Law of Settlement had extended the labour market and counterbalanced some personal hardships? that the dove-cotes of the bishops had been lately fluttered by a democratic Coriolanus, the M.P.

for Stroud? that Charles Lamb (some part of him), Edmund Kean, Sir Walter Scott, and the legitimate drama, were dead or dying? revivals were, as yet, unheard of in Ireland and America? that Mesmerism, National Education, and the Orleans dynasty were the reigning topics of the day? and that Young England, under the advice of mediæval Oxford, was embalming a carcase, not worth a hundredth part of the gums with which it was to be preserved? Something like which Burke has said of the cumbersome machinery of old establishments when they are once dead and gone, speaking politically; religiously, he would have been equally right at the time I mean—or now.

The year, then, is as nearly marked as need be, and the season was early spring. As you walked up one street and down another, London reminded you that a light soil and a turnpike road were not the only bases on which dust could be raised; and that dust was none the pleasanter because it was adulterated with the (faugh!) perfumes of a great city.

There was a sun, too—let no foreigner doubt it—obscured somewhat by the London smoke,

but giving a cheery prospect of coming summer.

Charing Cross was all alive; for at three P.M., precisely, there turned into its fine large yard a good, active, little team, drawing after them the Dover coach. There was but one railway in England then, and that was between Liverpool and Manchester. The Express had discharged most of its passengers on its way along the Old Kent Road, and as the coachman unbuckled the reins, throwing them from him on either side of his horses, it almost looked as if he and the guard had no more shillings to receive, or (what was equally painful) as if there was no one else left to remember them. The suggestion, however, was but mutual, for neither one nor the other ever forgot a passenger.

As the guard jumped down from behind, the coachman evinced his interest in these final recollections by pointing with his thumb over his shoulder. "Jim, look out for the inside." And as Jim opened the door on the one side a very good-looking man opened it on the other, and handed out the inside, to which reference had been made.

The inside was a woman, and, to judge by her figure, young. She kept her face sedulously shrouded, as well she might in the cold and bright sunshine, if she had any regard for her complexion. The guard was satisfied without seeing it.

"Mathilde," said he on the other side; and she stepped lightly out and took his arm, while a porter took charge of her small complement of luggage. "At last, Mathilde! I have waited and watched this week past." They were now inside a hired brougham, which Gilbert Ferrers had brought with him to take her away.

"It was impossible to come before, as you and my mother might have known." Mathilde spoke English very well, but with a foreign accent, and sometimes with a foreign idiom; still, it was very good. Her voice, as she said this, was a little petulant, but she put her hand into that of Gilbert Ferrers immediately after; and, like many a child, he forgot the physic in the taste of the sugar-plum.

Then the carriage turned down a small street in the neighbourhood of Brunswick Square,

and drew up at a very modest-looking door. Externals are deceptive.

An old woman of no remarkable appearance rose from a bright fire, over which she was sitting, when she heard the sound of the wheels. As she made her way to the door of the ill-furnished little sitting-room Mathilde reached the top of the staircase, and threw up the thick veil that had hitherto covered her face.

It was worth looking at. Mathilde von Robeck, as she loved to call herself, was a woman of two-and-twenty or more. Her face was without colour to transient observation. In reality she was much paler, but of much more transparent complexion, than her countrywomen usually are; and the faintest blush of exercise or excitement gave an artificial tint to her skin unequalled by the most beautiful permanent colour. It was called up now—for after the old woman, whom she saluted as mother, had embraced her, Gilbert Ferrers advanced into the room, and placing his hands within hers, said, “And why not me too, Mathilde?” and kissed her. Then too might have been seen the violet of her eyes to grow darker, and the lids

droop over a mist which settled on them. Her hair was not golden ; but dark and burnished-looking : coarser and not so smooth as is usual in German women. Her mouth was very handsome in form, but large, and the teeth were even and white : the jaw was marked and massive. Altogether it was a very remarkable face, of great power, but not graceful nor quite womanly. It might be loved indeed almost by a sort of fascination ; but it was just as liable to be feared.

Gilbert Ferrers was equally handsome, handsomer in fact, but of so opposite a type as to make it worth an explanation. Every trait was perfect, to the wave of the silkiest and finest hair. His eyes were large, but wore a restless, suspicious look : undecided in colour, but darkened by their long and curling lashes. The peculiar characteristics of his face were self-indulgence and infirmity, not so much of execution as of purpose. To judge by his appearance, he would have been more likely to commit small vices than great ones. Yet he had plenty of courage for evil and none for good. Impulsive to a degree he was, and incapable of saying

"No;" neither was he quite a gentleman, though not far removed from it.

These people were curiously situated towards each other.

Frau Robeck (her daughter had found the "von" a convenient interpolation) was a German widow; once maid to a lady of high consideration, in foreign circles; whose antecedents involved Madame Robeck herself in no creditable scandals. One half of the world does not know how the other half lives, and so I may be excused for declining to penetrate further than the surface into the social status of a woman who went by the name of Mother Robeck.

Mrs. Robeck, or Madame Robeck, or Frau Robeck, as far as we are concerned, is of no great consequence. But she was the mother of one of my *dramatis personæ*, and let lodgings to another, so that we could not pass her by altogether. She had a handsome daughter whom she had allowed, perhaps even not unfortunately, to bring up and educate herself. The girl could have done no better possibly had she followed her mother's evil suggestions, undoubtedly had she followed her example. So she paid no attention

to her; and had picked up a certain amount of unreal knowledge and real scepticism among the young associates she had chosen for herself, before she was sixteen. She set to work to correct it after that age; and to a certain extent succeeded by the time she was twenty, if success can be so accredited. Mathilde's first want she discovered early in life; it was money: and she bent her energies to supply the deficiency. The means by which she acquired an ascendancy over her companions, and with it their pence, their labours, and their self-sacrifices, was worthy of a higher walk, in which, if the retribution is severer, the gains are greater.

Then with experience, if there came a spirit strictly honester, it was at least harder. She loathed the poverty, not the vices, of her bringing up. She derided ignorance, and applied her natural cleverness to every accomplishment—what will not four years of application bring about? She was already half German, and added to her native language French. She was in turns a proficient in sketching and in music. Not that she had any love of art as art; but she had talents to make it subservient to

fine clothes, gloves, ornament, and position : and at twenty years of age she had reached her first step in the social ladder : she had forged a character, and become a governess in a family not too scrupulous themselves to inspect others too closely.

It served her purpose for a time to restrain her panther-like propensities, and to lead young kittens as a domestic cat. Then she tried her hand at a ladies' school : and how well she resisted the temptation to break bounds, and lead her little *protégées* to the devil, the recommendation she took away with her will best tell. But she did resist, and secured golden opinions ; and then she started on the great voyage of life, well found and with what she called ballast, but uninsured. How, and when, we shall see.

She troubled her mother with but few visits, during this time, and less assistance : so the old lady was fain to provide for herself. It is true that an occasional waif or stray found its way to the back of the Foundling Hospital ; but it was a weakness which she afterwards regretted as thrown away upon an old lady so capable of taking care of herself.

Mrs. Robeck took lodgings, and occupying, as she did herself, a portion of the house only, was glad to secure the protection and assistance which it gave her. About this time, with small means and small portmanteau, the young man Gilbert Ferrers had fallen from the clouds, and alighted in London. He had slept one night at a modest hotel, and on the next, attracted by the *affiche* in the window, in the second floor of Mrs. Robeck's humble dwelling. He had some money, no employment, and apparently no friends ; but it was the dead season among Mrs. Robeck's customers, and half a loaf is better than no bread. Gilbert Ferrers, if once installed, and choosing to remain, was difficult to be got rid of.

But why should he be got rid of? Was not Mrs. Robeck accustomed to mystery? Did it signify to her that her lodger would answer no questions, seek no work, and show himself only in the dusk of the evening, when, if hawks are abroad, they miss their prey?

What was it to her that his hands were white, his linen good, his boots thin, and his handkerchiefs cambric, excepting for the purposes of

unjust appropriation? She could only put to use the last, and there were too few of the rest to steal without detection. If he had his faults, he had his virtues; for consecutive weeks he paid so regularly, that he had established a claim upon the score, had he stood in need.

But he never showed this need; and his only misfortune was that he fell in love with Mathilde on one of her accidental visits to her home. It was easily brought about. They met on the stairs of her own mother's house, and each appeared to have an equal right to the wall. Instead of quarrelling about it, they bowed and smiled, and made friends: and they were both too handsome not to appreciate beauty in the other. The intimacy had ripened over small suppers, and mutual condolences, humble fêtes, and stolen junketings, to which Mathilde soon discovered that her lover had never been accustomed. Mathilde early discovered too that he must be a gentleman in disguise.

Gilbert Ferrers made no mistake about Mathilde Robeck. He knew her entirely for what she was: but her beauty and her brains had made a wonderful impression on him. These

lovers had never spoilt their romance by talking of marriage; what was to be the settlement, and whence was to come the trousseau; for these were the days when Mathilde was learning to teach herself.

Then Gilbert Ferrers had got employment; and his clothes became shabby, and as he no longer dreaded the daylight, or at least submitted to it, such fallings off were the more apparent. And Mathilde too got her step—her first step, and then her second; and Gilbert Ferrers' reverie was broken into by a sort of reality, the absence of his love. Mrs. Robeck was not sufficiently attractive to keep him there, in Mathilde's continued absence; so just as he began to wear an appearance of respectable poverty he too went away.

But although he ceased to live at the back of Brunswick Square, Gilbert continued to correspond with Mathilde, while she was the native Parisian in a third-class ladies' school in Wiltshire. The house too had still attractions for him, for he went there periodically: that is, whenever he expected to meet with Mathilde. And now we have found them both there together.

"Mathilde, my child, you have grown since Christmas."

"I've had nothing else to do—why not, then?" replied she, throwing off a bonnet, and letting her massive rolls of hair fall upon her seat. "Why not?"

"Women may grow handsomer or larger at your age, but not taller, and that's what your mother means. I see no difference."

"You're not complimentary, Gilbert."

"It was not needed. And how is your friend Miss Montessor?"

"Well; as all successful people are or ought to be. My journey from Schlagstein is on her behalf. I am to go to Ireland."

"It's a long and fatiguing journey. Can you go alone?" It was Gilbert Ferrers who asked the question, and a cadence in his voice made the question very comprehensible.

"I have just come from the South of Germany without an escort," replied Mathilde coldly, "and surely——"

"Was that my fault, Mathilde? You know my employment——"

"'Is as engrossing as yours,' you would say.

But I cannot well accept your escort, if you could offer it—where I am going, and on the business I am about.”

“So-o-oh!” said Mrs. Robeck; “and what may it then be?”

“I am going on a visit to Lord Fitzcourthope. On mutual approval I shall carry back with me his ward—a lady—who may be ugly or handsome—good or bad—for I know nothing about her; but the connection is a good one for the Establishment, and she has a private fortune of ten thousand pounds.”

“Lord Fitzcourthope,” said Gilbert, partly aloud, partly to himself. “No! I can’t go there with you, Mathilde.”

“Unless you were my husband,” said she, half-laughing at the idea.

“And then we should not have been asked.”

“True! I forgot that.” And Mathilde resumed her gravity.

There was a pause after this, till Gilbert Ferrers took out a cigar-case, and began to smoke, lounging as he did so to the window.

“Expensive habits, Gilbert, still.”

“I can afford them now. Will you have one?”

And he selected a small cigar, or cigarette, offering it to Mathilde von Robeck.

"Yes! Give it me. I've been too long respectable. Schlagstein is so small that there is no room to forget oneself." Saying which, Mathilde began to smoke with a defiant air.

"There, sit still—as you are—that's becoming to you, Mathilde. So you should always be." And Gilbert Ferrers, taking out a pencil, began to sketch his mistress; an art for which he had a talent.

"Always or never, Gilbert." And as suddenly throwing the remains of her cigarette into the fire she relapsed into silence.

Looking at the room as we have described it, small, mean, and dingy, two persons out of the three were too large for it, if not physically, at all, in essentials morally speaking. One of them thought so, and with a careless adieu to Mrs. Robeck, and a somewhat more *empresé* leave-taking to her daughter, left the room.

"Gilbert seems altered, mother. How long is it since you heard of his good fortunes?" said Mathilde, as soon as she heard the street door close on him.

"Since Christmas. When you went back to Germany he seemed to think that something was to be done, and he has energy when he will."

"Energy? He has more; he has genius, *geist*; but that does not give bread to the hungry; and six months back Gilbert was not so flourishing as to have refused a *tartine* of *Schwartz-brod*."

"He has reasons, doubtless. Do you not know them?"

"How should I? He does not make me his *confidante*."

"You correspond," said her mother, eagerly.

"Yes; but not much lately. He has told me nothing."

"Gilbert has friends at court. He is in a situation in a City bank; and, as you see, is in different case for the last year or two from what he was. What does he say about the marriage?"

"Marriage! We have agreed not to mention it till we can do so with some prospect of its fulfilment. We can wait. I can, at all events."

"And it seems to me that he is not more

anxious about it," rejoined the old woman, with a malicious grin, which was not thrown away upon Mathilde.

"There may be other reasons for his not exhibiting great eagerness to tie himself irrevocably to such a home as this."

"Let him take you to a better. He's well able to do it." And old Mrs. Robeck fluttered out of the room.

Mathilde looked in the fire, and wondered whether he was able or willing. As the embers got lower and lower her meditations assumed a more palpable form, and they ended curiously, considering that she loved Gilbert Ferrers, and had confessed it to him. Loved him; that is, as well as she was capable of loving. In natures such as hers love was sure to take one of two forms, and which of the two in her case circumstances would decide. Either passionately, wildly, unreservedly, with intensity of feeling, to sacrifice everything, or with a calculation that would make the man of her choice a stepping-stone to her own advancement. Self was at the bottom of both, and quite as much so in the former as the latter. In the one she would have

dragged him down, and in the latter she would have pulled him up, to suit her own purposes. Which was it to be?

When Gilbert Ferrers reached his own rooms, in a comparatively fashionable quarter, the fire was bright, and he momentarily contrasted the scene he had left with the comfortable well-appointed lodgings which received him. "No, no," said he, thoughtfully, "it would never do."

"What wouldn't do, Ferrers?" said his friend, Percy Hardman, jumping up from the arm-chair. "I'll tell you what wouldn't do—to forget that that bill for five hundred becomes due to-morrow, and that we must find the money to meet it."

"No; true, Percy. Sit down and smoke a cigar, and we'll talk the matter over before dinner. It's nice and dark, and we can't see one another."





CHAPTER II.

THE IRISH PICNIC.

THE process of meeting five hundred pounds with nothing, though the labour be divided between two, takes time; and, when the time has nearly expired, it takes talent. It was a talent pre-eminently belonging to Gilbert Ferrers; and while Percy Hardman set to work to raise objections to some rascalities, Gilbert combated them by putting into practice the suggestions of his own cunning and adroitness. They did raise the five hundred in time, as one of them had raised many more; and, while they are doing so, we will anticipate Mathilde in her visit to Ireland.

Lord Fitzcourthope, of Castle Courthope, was a man of sixty years of age, whose rent-roll had

never been sufficient for his expenditure, and never could be. There had been a talent in the males of the family for spending money since the days of our common ancestor, Brian Boru; and the hereditary capacity had settled with renewed vigour upon each as he became more and more impoverished. The present owner of the title shared a not uncommon belief, with many plebeians, that an utterly ruined Earl was as great a chimæra as the Dragon of Wantley, and as inappreciable as the sea-serpent. This belief kept him happy, or, at least, apparently so, in all difficulties, and imparted a grace and a courage to his liabilities, which bore something like the admiration we accord to the as yet unbeaten possessor of a broken weapon. He literally flourished his poverty before all eyes by a sort of makeshift extravagance, just as a man might flourish a sword hilt in a battle, forgetful of his incapability to strike, and regardless of the common prudence of abstinence or surrender.

The Earl sat, on the morning after Mathilde's arrival in London, at a well-stocked breakfast-table in his Castle of Courthope. He looked out on a lovely landscape, one of the features of

which was the rippling, sparkling stream lying at the foot of the well-wooded hill.

"Honor, my dear, have one of these trout. No man in Ireland has such trout as ours." Lady Honoria Berrylands was the Earl's eldest daughter.

"Ours, papa? I'm afraid they haven't been ours for a long time. Courthope says he doubts whether the sheep you buy are really yours when they're fat, as the grass they eat certainly belongs to somebody else."

"That's a most honourable but eccentric view to take of the property, my dear; but if we hadn't mortgaged Dunraven I don't see how Courthope could have won the Guineas with the Vol-au-vent filly." And then the Earl went on eating the trout, which had no more effect on his digestion than if it hadn't been caught by his man in water that had been mortgaged up to the last minnow. But Lord Fitzcourthope, though he owed tens of thousands, was a fine, generous-hearted Irish gentleman, and a prime favourite with everybody. There could be no doubt of that by their never asking him for money. He was a tall, thin, delicate-looking

old gentleman; but he went into the world and pillaged it like a strong man armed. Some men contend that a man cannot be called generous who is only generous with other people's property. Perhaps so. I have no time for splitting straws; but his was a nature which must have exercised generosity, and a position which could not have exercised it in any other way. I have not made up my mind upon the subject yet; but he thought it better to be generous with other people's property than not at all. It may be an Irish way of looking at it, and he was an Irishman and an Earl too; a combination which was irresistible as regards power and illogicality. The reader will forgive the coinage.

At this moment a girl of about seventeen, whose dress, in point of length, was a happy compromise between womanhood and the school-room, entered the breakfast-room somewhat brusquely.

"What, Myra," said the old gentleman, with a mixture of affection and gallantry, as he kissed her on both cheeks, "where have you been?"

"Riding," said Myra. "I've been trying Courthope's new horse, sir, this morning."

"I don't think he'll approve of that," said Lady Honoria; "he's very particular about his young horses being properly handled."

"And left word with Dennis that I was to be the only one who was to ride him," said Myra, with a rising colour, as she took her seat at the table.

The arrival of Myra Gray to join the remnant of the breakfast party—for Lady Catherine and half a dozen guests had already disappeared on their various pursuits—will give a colour to the Earl's character, and serve to help a lame dog over the stile.

Eighteen years before the time we speak of, or thereabouts, Lord Fitzcourthope, then Mr. Courthope, had been serving his country. A brother officer, of good family, and but moderate means, had been his intimate friend. As an intimate friend he had done him unintentionally a most inamicable turn. He had died in his arms.

But this was not all. Poor Gray had done by Courthope as he would have acted by any other

friend, and have had any other friend act by him. He had bequeathed to him the care and cares of a young wife, at that time anxiously expecting his return to England. Was Lord Fitzcourthope, who at sixty could not learn prudence, likely to be daunted by the suggestions of friendship eighteen years before? Certainly not. He took the charge, buried his friend on the shores of the Mediterranean, and returned to England to find that the shock to her nerves had relieved him of one burden to replace it by another. Mrs. Gray died in giving birth to a daughter, who was transferred, by a sort of common consent, to the dead man's friend.

That's how Myra Gray came to be found at Castle Courthope, when she ought not, theoretically speaking, to have had where to lay her head.

"Myra," said Lady Honoria, "will Miss Straight be waiting for you? because I think you'll find your ride has made you later than usual."

Myra moved in her chair, but made a pretence of one more piece of toast and some marmalade, which she had difficulty in eating.

"And Myra, as you've taken it out of Court-hope's young horse this morning, you can find something to carry you this afternoon. After lunch we'll ride over to Glengarriff, and look at those Kerry cows of O'Leary's. I'd like to buy half-a-hundred for the home acres." Upon which Myra swallowed her tears and her marmalade, and bestowing a hasty kiss without a word upon her guardian, went in search of Miss Straight.

"Papa, you spoil Myra, and always have."

"Indulge her, you mean, my dear," replied the Earl, with a rare shrewdness as to the distinction between the two. "Look at her position, as compared with your own. She hasn't a soul in the world to care for her, and when she goes to Germany—by-the-bye, Honoria, have you written about the house for the season?"

"Indeed I have. I've declined the house in Grosvenor Place and taken the smaller one in Wilton Crescent."

"But will there be room?"

"You forget Myra will not be with us, nor Miss Straight; and the additional expenses of her finish in Germany——"

“Oh! that’s nothing; her own money will cover all that, and more than enough.”

“Her own money. She had but four thousand pounds, and——”

“That has become ten—so we’ll say no more about it. It will keep her from want for a couple of years, and when she returns may help her husband if he’s a poor man. Such a girl as that is sure to marry.”

“Ten!” said Lady Honoria, with something like a sigh of regret and a stare of astonishment, for she did not think her own chance of matrimony entirely gone at seven-and-twenty, and then sailed majestically out of the room.

It was true. Myra Gray had been left with but slender means; and Lord Fitzcourthope, with all his struggles, had taken care of the girl’s few thousands, taking nothing for her personal expenses, educating her as his own daughters had been educated, until her little fortune had more than doubled itself; and now Myra was going into the world as a small heiress.

Can any one account for this act of real generosity on the part of this impoverished noble-

man? Aristotle, or Mr. Mill, or Bishop Butler, might have found some clue to an analysis of such a trait—in his selfishness, I presume. It gave him intense satisfaction—possibly; and what a charm, what a pleasure, to have extracted from the mass of his difficulties! Well! let philosophers account for it. The man who would have allowed, nay, had allowed, hard-working tradesmen to give up their substance, whose butchers and bakers had found him meat and bread for nothing, and whose very clothes were often unpaid for; who sat on other people's chairs and sofas without feeling a thorn, and whose borrowed bed was as soft as eider down and innocence could have made it, had refused his just rights to enrich an orphan girl, who was nothing to him but a waif. Let some one account rationally for it. I can only do so by saying he was an Irishman.

Myra Gray had been buried alive, as far as society was concerned, at Castle Courthope. As far as society was concerned. For she had been allowed to roam the country far and near on her pony, almost unattended. The family went to town for the season, and my lord, an acute and

eloquent politician, aired his rhetoric among the lords to every purpose but his own interest. Myra made the most of her liberty, during these absences, until the ladies, Honoria and Catherine, had chosen between two evils, a governess for their father's ward or the season in England.

They chose wisely. Myra was too young to be out, too wild to be confined to the area of a fashionable square without proper attendance ; and maids and governesses cost less of money and trouble at Castle Courthope than in Belgravia. Besides, was not Lady Catherine young and pretty, and ought Lady Honoria to jeopardise her sister's chance, or, indeed, her own ? for Myra was growing up nearly beautiful.

When Lord Fitzcourthope was first made aware of the necessity of doing something more with Myra than supplying her with food and raiment, he naturally turned to his daughters for advice. The Countess had been dead some years.

"We can't take Myra to town, pa. She can't be presented yet."

"Why not, Honoria? I don't see it. Put her into long dresses."

"You wouldn't like to consider a four-year-old broken only by putting on a bridoon and a breastplate?" Lady Honoria knew something of her father's tastes.

"Certainly not," said the Earl, laughing. "How do you propose to break her?"

"She ought to go abroad to a very select school for a year or two. Catherine will be married, perhaps; but I can't take the charge of two *protégées* at once." And from that day the foreign scheme had been well talked over, and eventually decided upon.

There was at that time a fashion for foreign education. Even ladies of high position and greater experience than Lady Honoria Berrylands gave way to a mistaken notion that some charm attached to a manner, which accords with the costume, the living, and even the idiomatic language of a foreign court. The more, however, that we have known of the Continent, its morals and its manners, the more have we learnt to appreciate our own. Is there any charm so great as that which is thrown over a

circle by the influence of a highly-bred English woman?

A few days after the conversation I have just recorded a letter reached Lady Honoria. It was from Mathilde von Robeck, fixing an early date to come over and make the acquaintance of her future pupil, preparatory to taking her away to Germany. Address under cover, to the care of Gilbert Ferrers, Esq., Carlton Chambers, London. It was answered with the warmth that is never wanting to a guest in an Irish family, and in due course of time Mathilde arrived. To a very fastidious taste nothing could have been detected to shock or disconcert the received notions of what a well-educated woman should be. To the ideas of a less refined person, such as Lady Honoria, the agreeable break to their ordinary life in her arrival gave unalloyed satisfaction. She and her sister had determined to see no flaws; and the Irish gentlemen and fast dragoons, who assembled round Lord Fitzcourthope's hospitable table, declared Mathilde to be one of the pleasantest and handsomest women they had ever met with. Of her appearance there could be no two

opinions; and as she was not likely to jeopardise the chances of either of the Earl's daughters, or the young ladies who rode over to luncheon, or assisted in dragging the fish-ponds at the Castle, one word only was applied to the future *gouvernante*: she was positively "charming."

"And how do you like her, papa?" inquired Lady Catherine.

"Like her, Kate? She's too good for the place. Roche is in love with her, and we shall have difficulty to smuggle her out of the house. I thought he and young Scarsbrook would have been out about the colour of her hair before this. Her manners are perfect."

"And so accomplished. Myra seems to have taken quite a fancy to her."

"Then I shall have less difficulty in parting with the little gipsy."

"Isn't that just what I said! It's that indescribable foreign manner, which is what Myra wants so much, to give her an air of fashion." Lord Fitzcourthope had never discovered this want before, but he didn't say so, as he was just wondering how he should meet Tillson's bill on the following Monday.

Mathilde was a very clever woman, and had played her game admirably. She soon discovered that rivalry was the sore subject with Lady Honoria; and that, as she governed her father, and everybody else, she was the person to be conciliated. She found herself at Castle Courthope with a bonnet nearly the same as Lady Honoria's; it was at once consigned to the bottom of her wardrobe, and a less becoming head-dress substituted when she next appeared. She saw that if imitation is in some places the most delicate flattery, it would not do here. Women of thirty are suspicious of younger ones, and handsomer, when they approach their style. She was careful not to sing before Lady Catherine, who affected that accomplishment; and she set Sir David Roche and Colonel Scarsbrook at so great a distance that there remained nothing for these Irish bloods to quarrel about. It would have been as wild a project as going to law for somebody else's property. She perceived, too, that a light and easy gaiety, which sat so well upon her, was too much like the cheerful banter and well-bred repartee of Irish society to be endured without

some misgivings; so she adopted the cold, retiring form, which equally well became her handsome figure and striking features, to say nothing of the position she was understood to occupy towards Myra Gray. Alone with the peer, she was the well-informed woman of the world, the guide and companion of his *protégée*.

A man like Lord Fitzcourthope was a fine subject for the delicate flatteries of a pretty and clever woman like Mathilde. He was peculiarly susceptible to such influences: an unprincipled person about women, and even at sixty as easily led by them as he had been when his reputation for *bonnes fortunes* was at its height.

He had been really averse to the whole of this foreign campaign. Mathilde had reconciled him to it in a couple of days; as she might have done to any act of thoughtlessness, or to any infliction of pain. It is well that the Mathildes are not as numerous as the Fitzcourthopes in this world. He could see nothing but pleasure for Myra, and would willingly have changed places with her himself.

One curious little incident happened before

their departure for the Continent, which, though not remarked on at the time, was remembered afterwards in connection with Mademoiselle von Robeck.

Not far from Castle Courthope there were some very picturesque ruins—a lion of the neighbourhood—and as the weather was fine, though the spring was not yet far advanced, it was proposed to make a riding party to visit them, sending on luncheon, and inviting some neighbours to meet the Berrylands party there. No more enjoyable proposal could be made. The party in the house was about to break up, as the Earl's London season was about to begin, and the day, if successful, would be a little *fête*, in which Myra, although not yet out, might be included with her *gouvernantes, in esse and in posse*, with no breach of propriety.

The Ladies Berrylands rode everywhere, so there was no difficulty as to the mode of conveyance for them. The Earl had been known to declare that he hated walking more than riding, and riding, if possible, more than driving; so that upon this occasion he decided consistently for the phaeton and Fraulein von Robeck, who

modestly protested against occupying the pleasantest seat in the cavalcade.

"And how is Miss Gray going?" inquired Colonel Scarsbrook.

"With Miss Straight in the pony-chaise," said Lady Honoria.

"No, Honor, let her ride one of Courthope's horses. Miss Straight can go in the barouche with Mrs. Considine and Lady Helen."

"Certainly." And after all the men had selected the horses they liked best, and the companionship they preferred, they were not long in reaching the ruins.

Irishmen are fond of what is called "schooling," I mean, for the information of the reader, not themselves, but their horses. The consequence of which is that a ride in the best company in Ireland is a much more exciting affair than one in England under the same auspices. I know which I liked best in those days, and I think I know which I ought to like best now.

"Miss Gray, this horse of Lord Courthope's will want schooling, I'm thinking," said a young subaltern to the lady in question.

"Indeed," said Lady Catherine, "I'm thinking he knows more than both of you together."

"Then I'll be able to learn something from him myself, Lady Catherine." Saying which, Mr. Bourke, of the Lord-Lieutenant's staff, who had reached Castle Courthope the day before, jumped the chesnut out of the road over a very ragged-looking fence, and galloped straight into a bog, out of which he scrambled with some difficulty.

"You've learnt what you didn't know before, Mr. Bourke, that the pleasantest-looking grass often conceals the dirtiest water."

"It's a severe illustration of every-day life," said the ensign, jumping back again into the hard road, with that confidence which one always exhibits on another man's horse, where it is a mere question of legs. The example, however, was contagious, and within ten minutes the road was deserted, and every one of the party, ladies and all, were on sound turf, with their heads set straight for the ruins of Killibeg Abbey.

The day was delightful, and with all the regrets that Myra felt, and with all the expecta-

tions of variety she had formed, she could not help thinking of the lovely country she was leaving behind, and of her favourite amusements, of which she had been told that she would be deprived for a year. It was many before she rode on the same fields again. Separation is death to the young, but death is only separation to the old. I think Victor Hugo has broached this axiom.

The scene was very lovely. The sun was shining brightly upon the landscape, which was a carpet of fresh verdure, with its bright spring green. A beautiful trout-stream wound its way at the foot of wooded hills, which rose from the plain, studded with dwarf trees, and patches of gorse, in the middle distance. Half way up, the ruins stretched themselves at intervals among the budding foliage; and, beyond all, to the left, where the hills fell somewhat abruptly, was seen a blue line, or ridge, of distant mountains, mingling with the hazy atmosphere, and figuring to a poetic mind the uncertainties of life. How nearly it paralleled the life of the youngest of them all was never suspected. The landscape was beautiful in itself, and here and there were

scattered groups, or detached figures, which gave life and animation to the scene. The handsome Lady Honoria, with her flashing eyes and dark chesnut, which she rode with all the grace of a finished horsewoman, accompanied by two or three of her father's guests; Lady Catherine and Sir David Roche taking a line of their own over the straggling fences; and Myra, with her girlish beauty, flushed by success, urged her active, well-bred cob in pursuit of her companion, Bourke, who was making his shortest way towards the rustic bridge which crossed the stream some mile or so distant from the water-meadows through which they were riding; on each side were well-mounted horsemen, verging by short cuts to the same point, and behind them two or three grooms in the Earl's livery, with more nerve than hands, following their charges at a respectful distance. Now and then a shout of good-humoured badinage proclaimed a sturdy refusal on the part of some less fortunate aspirant; and a cavalry officer, having come to grief at a blind fence, was endeavouring to repair the damages of his Lincoln and Bennett, suffering from the un-

wonted weight which his whole body had thrown into it. Vain effort! The stoutest of beavers was not meant for standing upon, when the edifice that it crowned took it into its head to turn upside down.

"Here at last, Myra. The shortest way is sometimes the longest, you see. Mademoiselle is already waiting to be lionised."

"So I see. We'll take one little turn before luncheon, if you like. We can explore the keep and the refectory later in the day." Saying which, Myra Gray put her arm through that of her friend, and carried her off from the crowd that surrounded the phaeton.

They took a walk round the outskirts of the ruin; and though Myra was upon this occasion the cicerone, Mathilde lost none of the prestige she had so undeviatingly been gaining. Her object, above all things, had been to captivate Myra, and she had succeeded beyond her most sanguine expectations. She contrasted so favourably with Honoria and Catherine. United to her reticent authority was so much flattering deference to Myra's opinions; so much of the admiring friend was mixed up with the sug-

gestive *confidante*. She offered advice only at the right time, and on subjects with which she was so manifestly conversant. Her experience of the world was so amusingly drawn out for the benefit of her pupil, and her anecdotes of her own life, and the unobtrusive advantages of social life at Schlagstein, were cleverly blended, so as never to detach the one from the other.

“You are to be my friend, you know, Myra—may I call you Myra?—but Miss Montessor’s pupil.” And Myra felt thoroughly happy at the prospect, and only pressed her arm closer as she assented.

At that moment they turned a corner of the ruins, and came upon a gentlemanly-looking man, leading his horse slowly down the slope, and smoking a cigar. He took off his hat, and then spoke to Myra kindly, and in the fatherly or brotherly way, that a man older by some years than herself might do to a girl whom he had known from childhood. Turning to look at her companion, he started suddenly, forgot to remove his hat, and had already a name of some kind on his lips when he stopped. Mathilde

drew herself up, without speaking; but Myra looked with astonishment from one to the other, and then said: "Mr. Deloraine, a friend of Lord Fitzcourthope, who is staying with us."

No wonder she was astonished. Deloraine looked disconcerted, and Mathilde assumed a look intensely cold and dead, a stare of imperturbable gravity, totally different from the natural expression of her face.

After a minute's pause Deloraine, again addressing Myra, said:—" *Au revoir*, I suppose luncheon is laid in the usual room in the ruins?" and passed on. Myra was about to speak, but Mathilde prevented her.

"Who is your friend, Myra?"

"Why, I almost thought he knew you! That's Henry Deloraine."

"*Tres distingué*. Is he rich? English people think so much of that."

"Very, and one of the best families in Ireland."

"*Un tres bon parti*," replied she, almost to herself.

"Foreigners think so much of that." Then adding, with intuitive perception of an unkind-

ness, "Let's go to luncheon, mademoiselle, and you shall find a seat by me."

They lunched, as people do lunch on such occasions, as if to make up for the inconvenience of feeding by increasing the quantity, and then rode home again, as they had come.

"Roche, who's that woman I met with Myra Gray in the ruins?"

"Faith, it's an epidemic, me boy; and you've caught the Mathilde fever. Sure, she's French, or German, or something. She's Mademoiselle von Robeck."

"Robeck! Robeck!" said he, slowly repeating it. "No! That's not the woman I mean."

"Oh, only hear him now! You'd make us believe you know her, with your London assurance. Sure, you never set eyes on her before. She's only a week from Germany, I tell you."

"Well, then, it can't be; but, if ever I saw a woman in my life, I know that face; and it's not one to forget, Roche."

"Indeed, you're right; but it's impossible."

"Well, I suppose so. So adieu, or I shall be late at mess; and the dinner of the — Hussars

won't be the better for keeping, nor the temper of the Colonel for being kept." Saying which he cantered up the hill, while Sir David joined his companions in the water-meadows beyond the bridge.

Myra went home thoughtfully, for there was much cause for reflection, and so did Henry Deloraine; but his reflections were not entirely of his coming dinner.





CHAPTER III.

MATHILDE CARRIES OFF HER VICTIM.

HENRY DELORAINÉ was a man of old family and good fortune, as has been said; but beyond this he had seen much more of the world than in those days fell to the lot of Irish gentlemen. It is true that as Ireland ceased to have a parliament, and, excepting in a special point of view, a capital of its own, the wealthier and higher classes had spent more of their money, and consequently of their time, in England and on the Continent. But no comparison of the time of which we write can be made with the present in this respect. It is not wonderful, therefore, that men of enterprise or refinement should have sought in distant fields a sympathy and com-

panionship which they no longer met with at home.

To Deloraine's life and superior acquirements it is not odd that there should have attached itself a suspicion of his steadiness. The fast men who saw much more of Irish life gave him full credit for a certain superiority arising from society and travel which he merited, but they also gave him credit for a sort of originality and participation in fast life which, if it be a credit, he by no means deserved. Tales were told and stories believed of his sojourn in London and Paris which it was scarcely worth his while to contradict. He was too honourable to encourage them, and not prudish enough to discourage what was considered a feather in the cap of most men of fashion. It is doubtful, indeed, whether he ever heard of them distinctly, and was only left to surmise them by a sort of deference which contracted vice pays to its more extended brother. He could not deny that he was the friend of men whose houses, studs, opera boxes, dress, and general style of living were the talk of his own country, and the admiration of those who lived on the outskirts of fashionable society.

But if the truth must be told, Deloraine was a great deal better than his neighbours. He was an honourable gentleman, somewhat inconsiderate, but given neither to high gaming at Crockford's or at Newmarket, nor out at elbows like so many of his countrymen, nor highly susceptible to the charms of the meteors of the Palais Royal and the Opera Comique. The facts, however, made but small impression on the minds of those who speculate on other men's virtues by a martingale drawn up after their own.

Two or three mornings after the picnic Deloraine got on his horse and started for Castle Courthope. Why not? There was an object of some interest to him there, and he certainly had no reason to balk his inclinations. He rode slowly, as men do, on a good walker, occasionally patting his horse, and valuing him at a somewhat more extravagant price than a buyer might have done. His thoughts, however, soon relapsed into their old channel, and centred at last in Myra Gray. After a lengthened cataphesis on her disposition and qualities, he smiled at the absurdity of his self-examination,

and said, "After all, she is but a child, and she'll improve of that as I get older."

At this moment his reverie was disturbed by the short, sharp trot of a horse behind him, and, turning in his saddle, he saw Sir David Roche, on one of Lord Fitzcourthope's cobs, rapidly overtaking him. Sir David was not particularly to his taste just then, but he received his greeting good-humouredly enough.

"You're out early, Deloraine," said the baronet.

"The sun's hot in the middle of the day; besides, I hoped to catch Fitzcourthope at home to luncheon."

"Sure find at one, unless hounds are out. I'm going back there now. If you'll let me join you, your pace is mine."

And then they began talking on indifferent subjects for a few minutes—minutes unendurable to the baronet, who had a great inclination for sifting his companion on the object of his visit. But he held his tongue, and his patience was rewarded.

"How did the salmon hatching turn out at your place?" said Roche, after having ridden in silence as long as he thought desirable.

"Well—very well. My river's an early one, and the fish have been up some time."

"What's the reason it's so much earlier than ours?"

"It's a lake river, and yours is not. I fancy yours fills from the melting snows, and they are always later. But the Courthope trout show as good sport as a salmon, and are better eating."

"Ah! it's the trout you're after. The peer will give us a day before I go back to Limerick, and I don't know how much more leave I'll get."

"I wasn't going to Courthope fishing," said Deloraine, half-laughing; for the expression had slipped out accidentally, though it looked like design from its propriety. Roche couldn't help laughing, for he was like most Irishmen, good-humoured enough to laugh at a joke even at his own expense, and began a protest with "Oh, come now, that's——" when Deloraine stopped him.

"I'll tell you what I want. I want to see that Miss de Robeck once more."

"Then I'm sorry for you; but you're just for all the world like the rest of us. She's put the right fly on, and she's just cleared out the lot of us."

"But why sorry that I should make one of you?"

"I'm just sorry for you as I am for myself. Didn't she start yesterday for Schlagstein, or whatever the place is? There's the Earl, and me, and Scarsbrook, and the Doctor, who came to see Myra before starting, and all the subalterns in the regiment, are bad with the same disease."

"But I hadn't time to catch it; you forget I only saw her once."

"True! well there's something in that; but you've a taste of it; what the little blackguards in Cahir call putting the 'Come hither' on ye. Lady Honoria and her sister think she's an angel, and little Myra Gray went away with her and old Larry to look after them, till they get on board, as if it was the pleasantest day of her life." Here the voluble Baronet took breath.

"Did she?" said Henry Deloraine, musingly.

"Indeed she did. The young lady herself didn't seem to see the necessity of Larry's attendance, but Fitzcourthope insisted very properly. 'For,' says he, 'if she don't know the attractions of herself and her pupil, I do.

They're too good-looking to travel from here to London without an escort, and if I don't send one she'll maybe find one ready made on the road.'"

"And Fitzcourthope knows no more than you who she is?"

"Not he; how should he? He's not a man to ask a pretty woman under his own roof who her father and mother were."

"But the companion of his adopted ward; it ought to be known!"

"Well, she calls herself Von Robeck. There's some of them in the north of Ireland, and I suppose she may be of the same family. She did not volunteer much information."

"But you had some queer notion that you had seen her somewhere before?"

"I wish I'd seen her again, for I can't imagine where or when it was; but I feel so positive of the fact—" and then they relapsed into silence again.

"Roche, don't say a word of this at the Castle. I must have been mistaken. I'll go in and lunch with Fitzcourthope, and lionise his gardens now I am here." Saying which the two

gentlemen gave their horses to grooms in the stableyard of the Castle, and walked unannounced towards the drawing-room. The luncheon and the afternoon passed pleasantly enough, and Deloraine rode back in time to dress for dinner. They talked of salmon and the season, Roman Catholic Relief and Garcia, Vestris and Lord Liverpool, and touched on the prospects of Myra and her new governess crossing the Channel; but Sir David kept his counsel, and Henry Deloraine declined to stay to dinner, and so departed.

"When does Mr. Deloraine go to London, papa?" said Lady Honoria.

"What brought him here to-day, Sir David?" said Lady Catherine.

"He doesn't go till the week before the Derby," replied Lord Fitzcourthope.

"I believe he's smitten with Miss Mathilde," replied the baronet.

"Another victim," said Lady Honoria, as the dressing-bell rang, and this time she spoke with a *soupçon* of asperity in the tone. But Sir David did not betray confidence beyond this, which for an Irishman, whose business at present was to

make dinner-conversation for the ladies, is saying a great deal. To him, of course, the thing was plain. A case of mistaken identity had arisen, by which some past intrigue of Deloraine's, some "*nitor Glyceræ splendentis*" had bid him "*finitis animum reddere amoribus*;" one of those old conquests which the world—the Irish world—ascribed to him; and he took credit to himself that not even the hawk-eyed, pelican-like acuteness in fishing of old Lady Cardrack had been able to get out of him half what he conjectured.

Deloraine himself rode home with undefined ideas of danger to Myra, and a wonder what it was in her companion that had struck him with so forcible an impression of evil omen. So indistinct were his recollections that he taxed himself for his injustice. "Well, well! it was better not to have made old Fitzcourthope uneasy for anything so impalpable as a hazy resemblance to a nonentity; and as to Myra—after all, the thing's over, and I must wait. I wonder what she'll be like when she returns to the Castle?"

A prudent Irishman is rare, but a most

brilliant phenomenon when it can be met with. The national character has so much good in it, that but for the leaven of light-hearted carelessness which is universally kneaded into it, it would beat our more calculating spirit in almost every undertaking. It is not that he forgets, but it is his incapacity to remember. He is the sincerest man alive, but never keeps his word. He is the most warm-hearted and generous of men, and allows his servants, his tenants, his creditors, to go to the wall that he may save himself the trouble of regulating his affairs. Pigs, sheep, oxen, and the produce of the earth, everything that he has to do with, excepting horses and dogs, suffer from his besetting sin.

This was not the case with Henry Deloraine, whose national faults of impulse were balanced by a very unnational virtue of consideration for other people.

While these unimportant movements among the *dramatis personæ* had been taking place, two more of the principal characters had made their way to London, escorted by my lord's butler, Mr. Larry. He had orders to attend the ladies to a certain hotel, to wait their pleasure when

there, to see them safely on board whatever vessel Miss von Robeck should decide upon, and to remain in town till the arrival of the family in Wilton Crescent.

He did precisely what he was ordered to do, thanks to the decision of the elder of the two ladies, without many blunders ; but if an unprejudiced person had to make that journey again, setting aside the gulf of distinction between a handsome woman and an ugly Irishman, he would much prefer the aid and counsel of the former. If Larry was at home on the steamer, or among the hotels of Cork, the moment he touched British ground nothing remained to him but his impudence. His knowledge was all spent, and it required a guiding head to direct his trembling hands in procuring passports, berths, and money for the journey. He was, as Mathilde declared to her young friend, "always in the way, and neither as amusing nor as convenient as a baby." He was always cropping up in the wrong place, ordering the wrong thing, and never to be met with when wanted. "We could have done very well without him."

"Yes; but it wouldn't have been right to travel alone, you know."

"But we must travel alone to Schlagstein."

"True; but then we shall be out of England. We shall not be known."

"Ah, Myra! I see, that makes a difference. One can do many things where one is unknown, that—how glad I shall be to get away!"

Myra saw that she was not quite understood; but the conversation came to an end by an announcement from Larry that all was ready for the next morning, and that a carriage from the hotel would convey the ladies to the docks at ten o'clock, which it did, with their Irish servant on the box.

Mathilde's affections had been tried. She not only allowed her mother to rest undisturbed by a visit, but she never permitted that sacred tie to be mentioned before Myra. Her delicacy would wound no possible sensibility of the little Irish girl, who would undoubtedly have wanted to make the acquaintance of the charming mother of so amiable a daughter. So she did not go near her. The purlieus of Lamb's Conduit Street, true to its traditions, knew nothing

but foundlings; and were not broken in upon by any undue expression of filial and maternal warmth, such as might have taken place.

Gilbert Ferrers might have considered himself neglected, but the same delicacy operated in a greater degree as regarded him. Why should Myra be made to feel the inexplicable distance between a woman without a lover and one with such an appendage? Why, indeed! Such were Mathilde's feelings on the subject, that had Gilbert crossed their path, so as to run the risk of recognition, she had made up her mind to convert him at once into a brother. Such a handsome pair, and orphans too.

But Gilbert Ferrers had himself no time for the prosecution of the tender passion; and much as he loved Mathilde, for, indeed, bad men think they love very tenderly at times, he had made up his mind that it might be very inconvenient to appear in that light before Myra. Is it the business of a governess, one too who was essentially foreign, to turn up suddenly with a lover? She had assuredly not trusted her Irish patrons with such a childish piece of intelligence as an engagement! Was

Mathilde a likely woman to parade her affections for the benefit of comparative strangers? Assuredly not. Their interests would be best served by remaining unknown to each other for the present. It would soon be too late to proclaim to the world their attachment; but it might be very difficult to disavow it later, if circumstances should render it desirable to do so.

In fact, Gilbert Ferrers argued very acutely that the management of a young lady with ten thousand pounds (for he had managed to ascertain that she had such a fortune) was as much as any governess could take upon her hands at one time. The idle and the independent are the women to make love to. They can reciprocate sincere attachment. But how can a woman, with so much extraneous matter to distract her thoughts, make a proper return for boundless affections?

And his time was occupied. There was the five hundred pound acceptance to be provided for, and the three days' grace was up. The money had been found; it would be indiscreet to inquire how. There were other matters, too, of the same kind, more or less heavy; and just

now, so exemplary had Gilbert's conduct in his bank appeared, that a company, with unlimited liabilities, sought his aid just now as its secretary. To such things sometimes love itself must yield, and his did so. He did not even meet them on the steamer, though probably he knew all about it.

There was, however, a considerable crowd, as there always will be, some on business, to assist their enemies in embarking, or to regret their friends; but the majority from motives of pure idle curiosity.

"Oh! Mathilde, did you see that man there, behind, in the crowd? I think I never saw so handsome a man. And he was looking at us. With such handsome features, straight and well-formed. You didn't see him, or you'd have remarked him surely."

"I was looking after that dear blundering Larry with the dressing-cases, Myra. He's a charming servant if one could but trust him——"

"Oh, Mathilde! I'm sure——" and Myra began his defence.

"Not to tumble into the water." And so

Mademoiselle von Robeck removed the unpleasant impression she had begun to create. "Love me, love my dog," is an essentially Irish virtue, and very nearly a heavenly one, "Feed my sheep."





CHAPTER IV.

MYRA IN HER FOREIGN HOME.

WHILE Mrs. Montessor, the directress of the Schlagstein establishment for the final polish of English ladies in those languages which they certainly have no means of acquiring in their own country, sits waiting for the arrival of the diligence from Carlsruhe, we will take a retrospective glance at the most prominent of our characters.

It seems quite impossible to enter a family, or to put a drama on the stage, without the assistance of a well-dressed puppet or two, and an estimable woman in her way, Mrs. Montessor, must do duty as one of ours. In contrast with her subordinate Fräulein Mathilde von Robeck, she was undoubtedly of little im-

portance to the story. Her antecedents are told in a few words.

She was an English woman, of no distinguished parts or education. She had been twice married, as happens to such estimable women constantly; the first time to a purser in the navy, by whom she had been carried half over the world, and been taught the science of naval economy, which she had carried with her into private life; the second time to a spendthrift bookseller, who had spent her money, subdued her temper, and left her in Germany at a fashionable Spa, as security for the bill he had run up.

Apoplexy, by great good fortune, killed him on the road home; a circumstance which answered two purposes. It saved the widow the expense of the external signs of woe, and those more decent exponents of a sorrow which she must have exhibited but could not feel, and it left her to pursue a feasible plan for obtaining a livelihood.

She removed to Schlagstein with the remnant of the purser's fortune. She took a good house by the recommendation of the landlord, a good-

hearted man, with whom she had been left in pawn ; and as no requirements were necessary for success but that of the English language, she was not long without a pupil or two.

Small beginnings among German ladies of fashion led to a more extensive connection, and Mrs. Montessor was a woman eminently calculated to improve them. Without being handsome, she was imposing. Where she picked up her good manners or dignity of appearance it would have been difficult to say. The British navy, in which her early days had been passed, is not famous as a ladies' school, and though the dwellers in St. Paul's Church-yard may be strictly what the French call *spirituel*, the late Mr. Montessor seems to have passed the greater part of his days on the shady side of the way.

It took but a few years to create and establish a reputation not only in the duchy of which Schlagstein was the capital, but almost all over that part of Germany. An Eberstein, and a Von Berlichingen or two, with a fledgling baroness and a *gräfin* of the Palatinate, soon made Madame Montessor fashionable : and when one

of the Grand Duchess's grand-daughters married an English duke, to the disgust of her royal relatives and to the delight of her royal father, who was exceedingly short of money at the time, England and the English became quite the rage.

With her own country-women Mrs. Montessor had a harder fight, but she was assisted by circumstances.

It so happened that the interchange of courtesies among crowned heads brought many foreigners to London; and although ladies of a certain rank were not unacquainted with the current language of society all the world over, true or false, there arose among them an affectation of German in its literature and its philosophy, which bore a prophetic relation to our court at a later time. If it was not flattering then to the first gentleman in the land, or to a sailor king whose English predilections were conspicuously betrayed in his unsophisticated notions of the turf, it was at least difficult; and the ladies and gentlemen who taught everything conversationally in six lessons succumbed before the most classical of modern languages.

The fashion for German did nobody any harm, and it did Mrs. Montessor a great good. She showed her tact by steadily refusing anything from her own country unconnected with a title, or with such an undoubted position as to run no risk of losing caste or money; and when Myra Gray's name was added to her list of aristocrats, it was as the *protégée* of the Earl of Fitzcourthope, a member of the House of Peers, and a *Gutsbesitzer* (proprietor) of an estate about the size of a German duchy.

Such an introduction soothed the prejudices of the Freifräulein who shared the hospitable board of Mrs. Montessor, and raised that lady herself considerably in her own estimation.

Nor must we leave Gilbert Ferrers without some explanation of his career as far as it was known, at least to Mathilde's respectable mother and Mathilde herself.

He had dropped from the clouds, as we have seen, upon the dwelling of old Mrs. Robeck. People do drop from the clouds in this country; and to judge by his antecedents, the clouds must have had a hard time of it, before his dropping. He had lived through mystery,

and, what is worse, through poverty. Humble lodgings had been exchanged for well-furnished chambers; and yet he was but a banker's clerk. Is it necessary to state by what means he had reached that apparently unattainable position? It was by a recommendation from what the old gentlemen in Threadneedle Street called "a most honoured client." But the client was one far removed from personal communication. Nothing less than the Atlantic separated them from each other. Is it necessary to add that the letter, and the character, were audacious but well-executed forgeries?

At present he confined himself to personal luxuries. He was careful to be regular in his attendance: and a handsome and winning person did much to throw dust in the eyes of his employers. His intrigue with Mathilde, broken of course by long intervals of absences, formed no part of their business, even if it had excited their suspicions. To tell truth, it was entirely unknown, even to the *mauvais sujets* whom he made his companions. He kept no horses, nor carriages, external marks of wealth far more remarkable than they are now; when

every booby must ride his hobby, and when rising talent is only believed in where it shelters itself in the recesses of a well-appointed brougham. Gilbert Ferrers had not got beyond the personal luxuries of women, wine, and play. "Alea, vina, Venus"—and as they contributed to the number of his friends as much as to his enjoyments, he had not to add the schoolmen's rhyme, "tribus his sum factus egenus." His women and his wine attracted round his table those whom his superior knowledge or cunning made his victims.

He was deep in bills, but he managed to meet or renew them, as occasion required; nor could time have passed slowly to men like himself and Hardman, who were constantly engaged in preparing (with considerable judgment, it must be admitted) for the day of execution. Yet there he was, always cheerful, and not inconvenienced by the excitement which the necessity of meeting a large expenditure must afford to a pauper. That there is a species of courage in a temperament like this (for the quality is various in its roots and development), it is useless to deny. Of his

entanglement with Mathilde we may say that marriage and love were so totally opposed to one another in the mind of Gilbert Ferrers, that they never occurred to him as dependent upon, or relative to one another. He did not love Mathilde von Robeck the less because he never dreamt of marrying her; nor would he have loved any woman the more because he intended to make her his wife.

We will leave Gilbert Ferrers for the present, to return to him shortly: for if not an agreeable character to analyse, he is essential to our story: and like the permission of vice in this world, if he serve no other purpose, he may at least be useful as a foil to virtue.

One word only about Mathilde von Robeck. She had been brought up rather viciously than coarsely. Her mother's acquaintance with the world, when her daughter was a child, had been vicious rather than low. Men of intellect frequented the house, and petted the brilliant plaything as a child. To a woman of great natural intelligence, and with an object in view, the discrimination between coarseness and profligacy is easy and natural, and we have seen

and shall see her mix in society far above her own, with no shock to our sense of probability. Her notions of "the good" were of the worst school of mistaken epicurism, her notions of "the expedient" were worthy of Machiavelli.

Myra Gray found herself in a strange place, and in society which at least startled her from its indifference to many usages which she had been accustomed to consider necessities. Mrs. Montessor, of course, had never been in good society in England, and economy made her content with foreign conventionalities. These are trifles, but they grate harshly on the sentiments of youth. Myra did not dislike her companions, but the Gräfin von Creveld and Fräulein von Ecclestein were not at all like the ladies Honoria and Catherine; and as Mathilde was the only one in the house who knew this, it drew her more closely towards her.

"Mathilde, do they never use salt-spoons here?" inquired Myra Gray after she had made one at Mrs. Montessor's one o'clock meal for a few weeks.

"Only in the best houses."

"I thought this was one of the best houses,

I'm sure Lord Fitzcourthope told me so." By which speech Myra rather alarmed Mathilde lest she should lose her so lately made acquaintance, and all for a salt-spoon!

"Of course it is—the very highest—that is as a *pension*. But if you wish it, I'm sure Mrs. Montessor will get some directly."

"And why do we only have dinner napkins once a week?"

"That's the custom of the country," replied Mathilde.

"Then it's a very nasty custom; at Castle Courthope we had them every day." Nor did Myra understand the difference.

"But, then, you see, everybody dines early here, even at the palace." And here Mathilde unconsciously announced a great truth. There is nothing slovenly or underbred that may not be tacked on to an early dinner; and dyspepsia, with wax-lights and propriety, is far better than healthy digestion and a second day's table-cloth.

Mathilde exercised a powerful influence over Myra; but there were salt-spoons before the autumn, and a modification of dirt in the dinner napkins.

"My dear Miss Gray," said Mrs. Montessor, with a dignity of manner, and a gracious condescension, which impressed the young Gräfinnen and Freifräulein with their matron's sense of that lady's position, if not with the position itself; "My dear Miss Gray, a servant from the palace has left a note for you from Madame de Horsemann."

The young ladies lifted up their eyes with astonishment, and Myra received the announcement without a blush.

"You know who Madame de Horsemann is, my dear?"

"Certainly—that is, I have heard. A lady-in-waiting of the Grand Duchess, and an old friend of my family," without much sense of the honour.

"She desires to see you at the palace. Of course you'll go?"

"Oh, yes, I've no objection, if you've none, madame. Couldn't Mathilde go with me?"

"Well, not exactly, my dear Miss Gray. It's a sort of command."

So Myra Gray went to the palace one summer's morning, and was presented to the Grand

Duchess by her guardian's old friend, Madame de Horsemann, who was Irish born. The old lady had her peculiar notions about what was right and wrong, and bored Myra considerably; but she was essentially kind to her, gave her advice and little presents; and, then, "to think of the honour," as Mrs. Montessor observed.

Madame de Horsemann was a very shrewd old lady, of about sixty-five years of age; very plain, in manner, dress, and appearance, and not the less so in language, by which she gave something more than advice—offence.

"My dear, I'm not fond of your friend," said the old lady, who was deaf herself, and consequently given to hallooing. "I don't like Fräulein von Robeck; and I never heard of the name before."

"Perhaps you don't know her," said Myra, determined not to relinquish her friend, who was a pleasanter companion, at all events, than the Grand Duchess's lady-in-waiting, or mistress of the tea-caddy, or whatever she might be.

"I could forego the pleasure of making her acquaintance, my dear, without any great self-restraint." At which Myra's colour rose per-

ceptibly; and, as she had done before, when the conversation displeased her, she wished Madame de Horsemann a good morning.

These visits to the palace, however, did Myra good. During the summer she changed rapidly from girlhood to womanhood, and began to know it. And her consequence increased mightily with Mrs. Montessor and the young aristocrats of the Rhenish Provinces, who revered everything that went into or came out of a palace, and a lady-in-waiting above all things. They trusted, themselves, to be some day *dames d'honneur*, and were qualifying, in part, without knowing it, through Myra Gray.

"Ach, Myra," says Fräulein von Creveld, "isn't Madame de Horsemann charming! Don't you like her?" For so had this little lady been taught ere she came to *pension* at Schlagstein.

"Snuffy old thing," replied Myra, in her own language.

"Ach? Now you talk English."

"I can't speak it in German; it hurts my teeth."

"You can speak German, Myra, very well

when you like," said Mathilde, coming to the rescue. "She's to go to the court balls in the winter too, my dears. What do you think of that?" addressing her pupils in French.

"Vraiment! Mathilde, nous parlerons Français."

"Who was the Count de Horsemann, Mathilde?" asked Myra.

"Oh, a very great man, Myra. Not German, but Swiss."

"Of what rank?"

"A Swiss admiral. A very great man, my dears," said the stately mistress of the *pension* who was bound to believe everything maritime as truly great, from Nelson down to little Billie, or even a Swiss admiral.

"A Swiss admiral? Oh, oh, oh!" laughed Myra. "Why, madame, they've no navy. How could that be?"

"Ah, you don't understand, *il l'était de naissance*: he was born so." But the obstinate Irish girl failed to be convinced; and, as Madame de Horsemann lost, Mathilde's influence gained ground—*tant pis*.

But the influence of Madame de Horsemann

née van Homrigh, of a good Irish family of Dutch extraction, could not be entirely extinguished by the *niaiseries* of the young ladies of Mrs. Montessor's establishment, or the witticisms of Mathilde herself. She had many substantial advantages to offer to Myra Gray, and that young lady accepted them with a grateful acknowledgment of the giver. The summer lingered on; the Court removed to its æstival residency; the blue and silver dragoons languished in the deserts of Schlagstein, or found amusement during its regimental leave at Homburg, or Spa, or Baden. The place was terribly slow for a time, and Myra's fertile imagination pictured the little blades of grass, which really had half a mind to grow up between the stones of the street. Freifräulein von Eberstein and the half dozen young aristocrats took their summer holidays, and left Mathilde and her charge to the dreary pleasures of excursioning.

They lionised the neighbourhood. Not a valley nor a hill, not a torrent nor a lake, within moderate distance of Schlagstein, they did not explore. Mathilde was bored to death,

but Myra loved fine scenery, and the neighbourhood abounded in it. However, Mathilde's was no common mind; and, if she had no real feeling for her friend's pursuits, she affected it, at all events.

Nor was the companionship without its effect upon the younger lady. By imperceptible degrees Myra emerged into the woman. By imperceptible degrees the relationship of governess and pupil modified itself, or ceased altogether. It is difficult to trace the exact limit to that period of life which we call girlhood, or boyhood, if you like it better. To be sure, the male reader defines it more easily for himself; he emerges (in these days I should speak in the past tense, for we play football and indulge in athletics till thirty) from hopscotch to a moor, and from elegiacs to horse exercise, with a very definite break. He escapes from his tastes for pocket-knives, gooseberry-tarts, and toy-terriers to Melton cords and a breech-loader, very palpably indeed. Not so she. A man may be a man without love. That subtle poison may exercise or not, as the case may be, an influence upon his growing youth; it will never inform

him of a new epoch in his life. A woman never knows where her hoop has ended and her hoops begun till she has been touched by a passing fancy or a passion.

When Myra Gray left Ireland she had honestly numbered her conquests by her guardian, his family, and his retainers. She had scarcely seen the men who frequented Lord Fitzcourt-hope's dinner table; excepting, perhaps, at some accidental fishing, picnic, or unpremeditated riding excursion. The hussars, who came over from the neighbouring barracks, had been devoted to the Ladies Honoria or Catherine, whenever they had found time for devotion to anything but a steeplechase or the drag-hunt. The colonels and the majors looked upon Myra as a pretty child; the lieutenants and cornets as a waif or stray belonging to the house, but not of it. When she left England she was not in the same case. She had seen a face, which clung to her memory too tenaciously for German verbs or Schlagstein metaphysics to eradicate. That one handsome face which she had seen in the crowd at the embarkation for Antwerp had constantly recurred to her; and now that she

was learning that a subtle power of attraction exists between the sexes, inexplicable, indeed, in such a case as hers, but no less true, the image came oftener and oftener before her, and produced a train of thought in its consequences no less pleasurable than new.

Now during the summer, a slow season at Schlagstein, Mathilde von Robeck has acted as a sort of forcing-house to Myra Gray. She cannot be said to have sown the seeds of this inexplicable fancy, but she unconsciously warmed them, and they flourished under the hot-water-pipes of her piquant and insidious conversation.

But at length the dreariness, the desert-like heat, and stupidity of the Rue Royale of Schlagstein was beginning to disappear. In England, Myra knew that Lord Fitzcourthope would be found in Scotland, or at Castle Courthope, or wandering about from one country house to another killing partridges, and mortgaging more property to satisfy the demands of private play. He was not coming to Homburg this year, or she might have seen him; but it is not too much to say that his impulsive affection

for the little orphan had cooled under circumstance of separation. The sense of protection too, which cherishes fatherly affection, was no longer so apparent as it had been. He was doing it only by deputy. So he shot grouse, and killed salmon, and lost his money, without thinking so much about Myra as formerly.

While he did this, the melancholy echo of the clanking sabre of some subaltern of the Grand Duke's army was replied to by its comrades. The gallant officers of that distinguished corps began again to walk by twos and threes (for it is curious that, though cavalry, they never rode), and make night hideous by their serenades. As the weather got colder, in perverse but consistent opposition to the busy bee, or the ant, or every other industrial example, these butterflies of the *trottoir* and the ball-room came out. The Opera was announced to reopen; a series of Court balls were fixed, with as much solemnity as if dancing were the occupation of the angels; casinos opened their hospitable arms; *table-d'hôtes* welcomed the foreign element, as it steamed homewards, England-wise, or for France, by the mighty Rhine, or ploughed

along with lumbering wheels and bandaged springs towards the capital of the Continent, taking Schlagstein in its way. And the Grand Duchess returned, and the palace chimneys smoked, like everything in Germany, and Madame de Horsemann came; for the winter campaign was setting in at Schlagstein with its usual severity.

Mrs. Montessor held the even tenor of her way. Myra Gray was doing her credit in her German and her French, as may well be supposed; and she held her own with the proud young *dames d'honneur*, *in posse*. But, to say truth, these ladies reflected great honour on the *pension*, at little expense to themselves; while Myra was an investment that paid. To do the old lord justice, he had placed that money beyond the reach of temptation, and only once or twice had regretted it. Immediately after the last Champagne Stakes was one of these occasions. But he was honestly firm (he had only hitherto been occasionally obstinate), for the first time in his life. Human nature is the same in the bosom of a purser's widow or a bookseller's relict, whether she live in Schlagstein or in

Turnham Green. Every mind must have a leading principle, if we could but get at it, and hers was self-interest. It would not do to lose Myra Gray at the present time; and Mrs. Montessor did not wink, but closed her eyes tightly, to anything that got in the way of her leading principle. She avoided treading on its corns by instinct; and, if forced to recognise it, she rode over it.

Of two things she was well aware: that Mathilde's was not a superintendence to do good to Myra, and that Myra would not be satisfied without her own way. To render Schlagstein agreeable to the ward of an English Earl was the first point, and another year's income might thus be secured; and it soon seemed that Myra Gray was in no hurry to return to Ireland.





CHAPTER V.

A DAME D'HONNEUR OF A GRAND DUCHESS.

IT was the beginning of winter, and sleighing had not yet commenced in Schlagstein, though it was cold enough for anything. Madame de Horsemann sat by an open stove, the nearest approach to an English grate to be found in the country, and amused herself with a French novel, an early production of a talented but not over-scrupulous pen, and some work. The work was peculiar of its kind. The old lady was making a rug. She was fixing with considerable care loose and variously coloured strips of cloth upon a string, which strings she afterward joined together and clipped to an even length.

An interested spectator of this work, or appa-

rently so, was a fair, handsome man, in the regimental dress of a Rittmeister. His breast stood out with apoplectic fulness to the maximum of cloth, his waist was drawn tightly to its minimum of sword-belt. He bent deprecatingly or inquiringly over the pleasant-looking old lady and her colours, with a view to assisting in an emergency, should one arise. The Baron von Rottenberg stood six feet in his stockings, weighed thirteen stone eight, was a likely man among the ladies, and not certainly given to watching a Penelope now bordering upon seventy. But he knew his own business best, and had not come to the palace for nothing.

“And the day is not yet fixed for the *bal masque*, madame?”

“Not yet, Monsieur von Rottenberg; but you will know in time. You will have your cards as early as possible.”

“Ah! I’m glad of it; as my sister passes through Paris, I shall entrust her with a commission to get me a dress. And are the invitations numerous?”

“Not remarkably so. Of course the Court

party, the officers, and from the country the most distinguished."

"And to the English residents?" inquired the Baron, with some degree of hesitation, more, indeed, than the question seemed to warrant.

"They will not be general; not so general as heretofore. I have a few *cartes blanches* for my friends; but then you know I am half English, and the Duchess is considerate."

"I too, you know, have been in England. Ah! madame, dare I take a liberty?" and he rose to his feet, drawing them solemnly together and sticking out behind with an *empressement* only equalled by that of his chest in front.

"That depends entirely upon what it may be. Modesty is not a distinguishing feature of your regiment, Baron, as I have had to tell Monsieur Degencassel and Monsieur de la Fels on one or two occasions. But I think you may be trusted, Herr Rittmeister, so say on."

"True, madame; but they have never been in England," and a compliment was here implied that always found its way to the old Countess's heart. "May I beg to ask——"

"What you will, sir."

“Are any persons to be admitted who have not been presented at Court?”

“An exception is to be made in favour of personal friends of my own.”

“Ah! madame, then I am in your power. You can grant me an invitation for a friend, a stranger, a traveller, whom I have lately known?”

“That, Monsieur von Rottenberg, would be to put myself in yours—and you gay gentlemen are too dangerous for that. Who is the person?”

“An Englishman; but he is not noble, and that may be a bar——”

“Not noble! Oh, in an Englishman one overlooks that. So many are not noble, Baron, who have every title to the distinction but that of having come into the world a year or two sooner.”

“Madame is in advance of her age,” with another polite bow and a futile attempt at a Parisian shrug.

“Not so far as your comrade De la Fels is behind it. I hear he refused to fight the young Englander, on whose foot he intentionally and

rudely trod at the Opera, because he was not nobly born or descended. Is it true?"

"Alas! madame, the rules of our service and of society——"

"Ought to keep hot blood cool unless it is prepared to be let loose. In my own country," and the old lady's mind recurred to days and feats of Sir Jonah Barrington, "we accorded the privilege of a gentleman to everybody who had the education, the position, and the appearance of one; and we took care never to inquire into his genealogy till the fighting was over." The old Countess had thrown aside the symbols of *étiquette*, and was standing with her handsome head thrown back and her arms interlaced. "It would have procured for the aggressor a box on the ears."

"But you forget, Countess, that we wear swords."

"It's a pity you don't forget it yourselves sometimes under like circumstances. However, Baron, who is your friend?"

"As I said, an Englishman, and in this neighbourhood under peculiar circumstances, which will give him more claim upon your kind-

ness than I can make. He has been advised to pass the frontier from Heidelberg, where he shot Count Entenberg in the knee; it has spoilt his dancing, and I don't think the Englishman dare show in a ball-room excepting under a mask."

"Count Entenberg is rightly served, in all probability," replied this staunch old Proxenus of the English in Germany. "He is remarkably quarrelsome, and Amelie von Berlichnigen is handsome enough to find another partner until his recovery. How did it happen?"

"The Count was warm and the Englishman cool."

"Not impossible; it's the temperament of those islanders."

"At this time of the year. The Englishman sat by a window at which he was reading in the Pfälzer Hof; the Count stood near to the stove, where he felt the heat. He could not put out the stove, so he opened the window."

"The Englishman's window?" inquired madame, properly interested.

"Precisely. And——"

"The Englishman shut it again, of course; and quite right."

"No, Countess, better than that. He civilly inquired of Entenberg why he had opened it, and he explained that he was too warm."

"And your Englishman acquaintance——"

"Lifted up Entenberg, and seeing that there was a little snow outside of the window, dropped him into it, hoping he was not hurt, as the window was not high."

"True politeness, Baron; he must be an Irishman."

"Possibly; but I don't know the distinction."

"One of Church and manners. So they fought?"

"Yes; and your compatriot shot mine in the knee-pan."

"I think we must promise him a card of invitation. Has he rendered himself famous in any other way?"

"Yes; he broke the bank at Homburg!"

"A gambler! that's very bad—and a successful one, that's worse! You know my friend the Grand Duke would cease to exist if these bank-breakers flourished. Well! it's something to have broken the bank and to have shot the most

quarrelsome of the Prussians in the Duchy. He shall have a card, but it must come in your name; and you will be responsible if he runs away with one of the Princess's attendants."

The Baron bowed as solemnly as usual, and having gone through that ceremony, shifted his feet from the first position to the fifth, and back again, unwilling, as it seemed, to take his departure. At length his courage returned, and he ventured to inquire of the formidable *dame d'honneur* whether or no her charming English friend would be at the ball.

"Why not, Monsieur de Rottenberg?"

"She has, then, been presented, and she is noble."

"Neither the one nor the other, sir. She is a friend of mine," and the Swiss admiral's widow drew herself up to her full height, which might have been five feet two, and shook her powder, which she wore in sad memory of a day when the Grand Duke's Court was a Court indeed; "and you have forgotten that the point has been waived in a presentation of your own."

"Ah! Countess, a thousand pardons; but

men can go anywhere; such a privilege is not always accorded to ladies."

"More's the pity, Baron. Times are changed for the worse in that respect."

"It is our loss, and *cette chère* Miss Gray is so charming. I cannot understand that she is not noble, and a friend of yours!"

"I don't think you ever will understand here that gentle in England is noble in Germany, and that Miss Gray's father was as proud of being a gentleman as her guardian is possibly indifferent to a title higher than the Barons von Rottenberg themselves."

This was a palpable hit, which the little old woman could not help administering to his conceit, the original Baron being of but two generations, a celebrated Jew money lender, who made his master's necessities subservient to his own ambition.

"So-o-oh!" gasped the Baron, with a prolonged grunt, "and *cette chère* Gray is an heiress?"

"I have not thought it necessary to inform myself on that head, Baron, as I have no intention of marrying her."

As this was a reproof even better deserved than the other, the Baron took his leave, as a Schlagsteiner of the First Regiment of Dragoons alone knew how to do so.

The echo of the scabbard of the sword of the Baron von Rottenberg had scarcely ceased to sound in the paved court of the Ducal Palace, when two more figures arrived upon the scene infinitely more interesting than his. Mathilde von Robeck and Myra Gray had been taking a walk in the Grand Ducal Gardens, which here, as elsewhere, were public. They were always pretty, but in winter rather served as a pleasant promenade for ladies, who preferred them to the monotony of the rectangular streets. They had attained a Cytherean pre-eminence later in the evening, where the ladies of the Court, whose matronity permitted the liberty, availed themselves of the advantages which a fortified capital was sure to afford in the way of military material for love-making. It is but fair to add that it was at a discount with unmarried ladies of German extraction, and conferred an unenviable distinction on some of our young compatriots, who refused to recognise that best

of all proverbs, "When at Rome do as the Romans do."

An Englishman abroad is, nine times out of ten, a fish out of water; and strange to say, a fish indifferent to improving his condition, though apprehensive of it. He speaks no language but his own, for if from among the million, his French is execrable and his German vile. He wears a shooting jacket and boots everywhere, with a billycock hat, from the Opera Comique to a *déjeuner* in the Faubourg St. Germain, if he can get there. He clings to his brandy and soda, his bad language, and his beefsteak, which he curses, because it is so well cooked in the kitchen as to diminish his chances of dyspepsia in his own inside. He believes in the universal rottenness of foreign governments, foreign manners, foreign equipages, and foreign fortunes; and if the suggestions of his mind are to be depended upon, Juvenal's description of Roman morals in general, and the Roman nation in particular, would be lenient if applied to the large cities of France or Germany.

With these ideas, and a hundred more of the

same kind, which have been treated of honestly, but *ad nauseam*, by hundreds of writers, it is not to be wondered at that the Englishman on the Continent usually joins the minority. He sees safety where others see danger, and immorality where others see none. He travels usually with a well-stocked purse, which he vulgarly assumes to stand him in stead of good manners and good feeling; and not satisfied with thinking himself better than others, he is unusually careful that every foreigner shall know that he thinks so. Gentlemen, in the highest acceptation of the term, well-bred, generous, unaffected, honest, brave, and good men are not so common among us here as most of my friends would have us believe, but we seem to take pride in diminishing their number infinitesimally as we increase our distance from Southampton or Dover.

Something of the same sort was enacting in Schlagstein. And an acute old lady, the better-half of whom was English, and who had seen the best society wherever she had been in that country, was not likely to be deceived by the plausible ambition of Colonel Brown and

Captain Smith; though one had added an "e" to his patronymic, and the other had converted an "i" into a "y" for the same ingenious purpose of scaling the ladder of fashion. The fast-dressing and *prononcés* manners of the Misses Rogers found favour only among the military, who flirted with the most impertinent unreserve before their brother officers, and behind their backs prevented their own sisters from anything beyond the most distant acknowledgment of them. Their very hospitality gave offence, and their readiness to spend their money was encouraged by those who profited by it, and sneered at it as vulgar prodigality.

But what made the English in bad odour was that determination to run their heads up against the stern wall of custom. The Court dined at three, it gave its little balls and suppers from eight to eleven, when it retired to bed to dream of its conquests, or to suffer from the nightmare consequent on too much *dampfnoodlen* and *niersteiner*. The English Browns, Smiths, Rogers, mothers and daughters, would dine at seven, would dance from ten to two A.M.,

would deluge themselves and their friends with champagne, such as was to be bought in Schlagstein, and would play whist and loo at stakes which would have been ruinous to the exchequer of a grand duke. One thing must be said, the girls, if fast and furious, were far better looking than the natives, and much more attractive ; so that the English *salons* were more *recherchés* than the old-fashioned, dimly-lighted, and economically-provided entertainments of the Ebersteins, Rottenbergs, De la Fels, and Schlossenmauers, or even of the Palace itself. Those rollicking young officers went home, and were loud in their censure and coarse in their criticisms ; but they never omitted an opportunity, with a prudence transmitted from the Great Frederick, of quartering themselves upon the enemy. If old Madame von Horsemann had known of the tender squeezings, and the serenadings, and the offerings, delicate and indelicate, which were made by the German legion to the Browne, Smith, and Rogers girls, she would have recommended His Highness to change their quarters for something less exciting, lest the Cannæ in which they were now

so victorious might prove a veritable Capua before the end of the campaign.

“Ach! Captain de la Fels, now don’t be teasing so; shure there’s Lucy looking at us all the time, and she’ll tell mamma.” And Captain de la Fels only laughed, and repeated the offence when Lucy was not looking; but he carried away with him the profound impression of English character, and descanted largely at home on what he called our insular eccentricities. It was certainly not his fault that he could not be disabused of the notion that this was our aristocracy. Did not we all call upon them, and flirt with them, and dine with them, and ask them to our picnics; and at the time that that swaggering puppy, De la Fels, was encircling Fanny Rogers’s waist, that unlicked cub, Morgan Rogers, who had been educated partly at home, partly at the village parsonage (for the Irish Church had little else to do), and wholly on rat-catching and salmon fishing, was at the Casino talking largely, and lying copiously about Sir Lancelot O’Rourke, The O’Byrne of Mount Scoundrel, Lord Dunacres, and the Duke of Castlecumberton, his intimate friends and

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neighbours. How should De la Fels know an English gentleman or lady when he sees them, and why should not he imagine the normal condition of an English girl to approach that of Fanny Rogers?

To tell the truth, the Grand Duke did not know them himself. Everything like a colonel or a captain was acceptable at the Palace. Exceptions were made in their favour. They were accompanied by daughters, who were very pretty, if not very well mannered; and it was not until a terrible *esclandre* fell out that some distinction began to be made in the commands to the court festivities.

One thing English girls would do. They would oppose the national taste as regarded the independence of unmarried women. The consequence of this was that the Palace Gardens, and the prettiest and pleasantest localities in and about Schlagstein, were always sure finds; and the young *militaires*, who are a swaggering self-sufficient set, were never slow to take advantage of the fact. They would ride, or walk, or sleigh, or skate without proper chaperonage, and the consequence was a

damaged reputation in general, and one or two cases of more than doubtful reputation in particular.

Mathilde had too much brains, and Myra had too much instinct, not to know all this; and although the latter accepted civilities offered to her by the English, it was with no intention of cultivating a close intimacy. We have said that these two ladies emerged from the Palace Gardens, where they had been walking with no second intention than that they led to the Palace itself. Being there, and seeing a sabretasch and spurs disappear round the corner, they congratulated one another on their escape, and went their several ways. We will follow Myra Gray, who walked up the principal staircase towards Madame von Horsemann's apartments. The wanderings of Mathilde, who went towards home, may be reserved for a future occasion.

"My dear Myra, this is very good of you. You come to relieve the solitude of a victim. Von Rottenberg is just gone."

"You forget that I know very little of the pleasures of German society."

"True, my dear. It sounds strange from me—may you remain in ignorance."

"Yet I like being here. My guardian is at Melton, and I have written to beg I may remain in Schlagstein."

"Then remain ; but be as German as you can."

"And yet you are so English."

"Truly, I am," replied the old lady. "They want assistance."

"Yet you recommend me a different course."

"Yes ; because you will preserve your self-respect by being more of us while you are among us. You will go with me to the Grand Duchess's ball ?"

"Ah, undoubtedly, madame, if you will allow it."

"And your costume."

"I think, with Mathilde's aid, I shall have no difficulty."

"Good ; she may be useful for something. You like dancing ?"

"Oh, I delight in it."

"Most good girls do. It's a pleasure to see the poetry of motion in the young ; and our Schlagstein cavalry——"

"Dance better than they talk, Countess. I prefer my own countrymen, but I know none here."

"Monsieur de Rottenberg threatens me with a new one; a hero, Myra, who has broken a bank and shot a Prussian count in the kneepan."

Myra looked grave for a moment, and then thinking it might be some of the old lady's badinage, replied, "And what guarantee have you that he is a gentleman?"

"I have no doubt of it," said the Countess, laughing. "To have attracted Von Rottenberg he must have the true Parisian swagger, with his hands in his pockets, and his impertinent cynical observance of everything around him. You know we get that from the French, my dear; but it doesn't sit well upon us. Germans are excellent middle-class people, but when they get into deep water, they usually begin to sink. When a rhinoceros takes to dancing, or affects the 'elegant,' he is very apt to lose his individuality without replacing it. That's the case with our Schlagstein society. It has missed all the wit and cleverness of Paris, and has pre-

served only some of its vices and impertinences. You are right, cling to your Englishmen, there are none like them ; but till you find them do the best you can without."





CHAPTER VI.

A SERPENT ON THE TRAIL.

WHEN Myra Gray reached Mrs. Montessor's, she was surprised not to find Mathilde von Robeck there before her.

It was not the custom for her to be out so late, for the afternoon was closing in, nor, as I have said, was it the custom in Schlagstein to be out walking alone, excepting under peculiar circumstances. Mrs. Montessor did not say, but looked, "What has become of Mathilde?" Myra looked the same at her.

Mathilde had left a pleasant little circle, wherever she was, and an innocent. The young countesses and ladies in waiting were seated in the *salon* of Mrs. Montessor's house, knitting, or mending, or darning, with a difficulty which

waning light is apt to produce. Yet they persevered. It was not quite time for their preposterous tea, so they got up a whispered conversation among themselves, which was only occasionally interrupted by the superintendent.

"I thought Mademoiselle Mathilde was with you, Myra," said the young Countess von Elberfeld, *sotto voce*, to Myra.

"And I thought she was with you. Hasn't she been in?"

"Not since you went out together after dinner." At that moment the hall-door bell rang, and Mrs. Montessor woke up from her arm-chair, and left the room.

"Won't Mathilde catch it," said a small princess, who was hemming her own pocket-handkerchief in one corner, not in that language, but in its equivalent.

"No, Charlotte, Madame never quarrels with Mathilde. I believe Mathilde could do whatever she liked——"

"Ah, but then Mathilde is not like you, you see, for she never likes playing at blind man's buff or hunt the slipper in the bed-rooms when

she ought to be going to sleep," said the sage Amelie von Elberfeld. "I wonder what Mathilde has told Madame."

"The truth, of course," said Myra. "What should she have to conceal?"

"Oh! Myra dear, you don't know; but perhaps you will, for Mathilde tells you everything, and then you can tell us, you know."

"Indeed, Amelie; is that your notion of secrecy?"

"Yes, dear, of course it is. What's yours?"

"When I have a secret entrusted to me, I lock it up, and throw away the key."

"Oh! you English are so particular," and as at this moment Mathilde entered the room, and rang for candles and tea, the conversation on that point ceased.

Amelie was right; Madame Montessor was a clever woman, but not a lady, and she knew the value of Mathilde's services, to say nothing of her appearance and influence with her *protégées*. She did not mean to quarrel with Mathilde, who was a sufficiently good judge of her own business to know how late she might venture to walk through Schlagstein alone.

But if it was not necessary that half a dozen little ladies of the average age of fourteen years should know where their governess of the golden locks had been, it is right that the reader should know.

Schlagstein has no old town, no tumble-down reminiscences. It looks from beginning to end what it is, square, rectangular, neat, and new. There was but one really picturesque spot in the Duchy, and that was never visited. The broad streets that ran at right angles to one another, and which were lettered and numbered, were the *recherchés* parts of the town. There was no mystery about them. They were good honest streets, unsuggestive of aught but respectability and a gilded oligarchy. There was not a square foot of poetry in the whole town, save and except only the old bridge by which you quitted it.

It was utterly unfrequented for good and honest purposes, and creditable love-making even fought shy of it. The young beaux and belles of humbler life sought their *Lustgartens* and their *tanz-saals*, but there was a prejudice against the Alte Brücke, which honestly-minded

young men or maidens could not get over. We mean the prejudice, and not the bridge.

The river, which flowed into the great Teutonic stream, was here deep, dark, sluggish. It was the only piece of antiquity in the place, and the bridge itself was next to it. When the new town was built, the bridge was untouched. The new prison stands on the other side of it, and the gurgling waters wash the base of the prison walls. That is why it was so built; and escape is doubly hazardous from the steep and slippery sides forming an escarp and counters carp to this part of the fortress. Thither Mathilde had been, and under peculiar circumstances.

When she left Myra at the foot of the Palace stairs, it was still light, but the afternoon was gloomy; clouding over, possibly, for more snow. But Mathilde turned away from her route to Mrs. Montessor's, which was but a stone's throw from Madame de Horsemann's apartments, and made her way by the least frequented streets towards the bridge. She did not hurry, for she had a certain amount of time before her, and whether it was spent on the bridge or on the road thither, was a matter of little difference.

There was just an equal risk of discovery, which she took care should only happen from a very persistent and impertinent curiosity. Rounding her shoulders, so as to conceal her height and the general contour of her figure, and drawing a thick black veil of doubled lace over her face, as though to keep out the cold, she walked on.

The unfavourable nature of the day was all in her favour. Such ornaments to society as the Blue and Silver Legion were not likely to be abroad in such weather, and as they never walked but with the object of attracting favourable attention, it was not likely to be in the more secluded parts of the town. Mathilde's mind, therefore, reverted to the business on which she was bent. The solitude of the streets through which she passed was peopled with one form, their silence re-echoed to one voice, which she imagined she could hear. Her thoughts were busy over former passages of her life, and looking onward to those as yet inscrutable, in which one image predominated, and its gloom or brightness equally excluded all others from the picture.

It was not long before she reached the bridge,

utterly unheeded and unmolested, to find it as deserted as usual. She was before her time if she expected a companion. So she leant over the bridge, and looked into the dark deep waters, more silent and more secret than the echoing streets she had left behind. Yet when she looked down, and by a whimsical fancy strove to penetrate its depths, she still saw one only figure struggling with its eddies successfully, and coming to its surface, self-reliant and determined, a conqueror. There was nothing but the dark walls of the prison, not an eye, not a window, to observe the half-nervous, half-gloomy expression of her handsome countenance at the moment, and it was this utter absence of all life or appearance of life or light, which constituted the present value of the Knight's Bridge, as it was called in Schlagstein.

Twenty physiognomists might have speculated on the beautiful face without being able to assign a character to Mathilde von Robeck. She was at one moment impulsive, passionate, regardless of consequences, and the next, cold, hard, sullen, and indifferent to them. She seemed now to be selfish, self-reliant, strong,

wilful ; and in truth it was the character of the lower part of her face which was eminently beautiful : now she was tender, pliant, lovable, and the luxuriant golden hair, and the long almond eyes and sweeping lashes, made her a Cleopatra or a Semiramis in her pleasures. Her true character was a puzzle, and not an amusing one, to unravel. Like all other puzzles and most other characters, it was made up of pieces, which only come out right when they have a master hand to put them together rightly.

She frightened herself by her own thoughts on the victorious water spirit she had just conjured up, and turning suddenly round, beheld the man in the flesh—it was Gilbert Ferrers who was looking over her shoulder.

“Mathilde, you are surprised to see me here!”

“I should have been so but for your letter. At that moment I was dreaming not pleasantly,” said Mathilde, putting her hand through his arm.

“Then I was not in the vision.”

“*Au contraire*, you were the centre of the group, the only one. But what brought you here, Gilbert?”

"A sort of necessity. Want of money. I won at Homburg hundreds, thousands." Mathilde's countenance brightened as he went on. "I had plenty, and thought of—— Well! all sorts of things: marriage——"

"Of sowing your wild oats?"

"Yes: and such a bed to sow them in too! but it was soon over——" and here Mathilde's face reassumed its usual expression of hardness. "I went on to Baden, and it all went and more besides."

"And what brought you from London?"

"Drove me, you should say. The bailiffs. They might almost have given me three months if I hadn't taken them. I've left the bank; so having nothing to keep me, I collected my household goods, shattered as they were, and came away."

Mathilde appeared to hesitate for a moment, and then assuming a voice of much tenderness, said, "Gilbert, if you want money, I have a trifle, some five-and twenty pounds. They are at your service."

"Five-and-twenty pounds, Mathilde! You're rich," replied Gilbert Ferrers, with a laugh.

"No; if I want them I'll ask for them. At present I'll try the air of Schlagstein for a week or two. And now, tell me about your *protégée*. Is she an heiress, or what did you make out of her in Ireland?"

"An heiress! well, not that exactly. She has a few thousands—four or five, I believe."

"My information is more cheering than yours. But I have other sources of knowledge. I think she's good for ten. Is she generous?"

"As a cornucopia. Innocent, simple, warm-hearted, and loving."

"Whom, Mathilde? That last is a positive or a negative quality."

"Who knows?—perhaps yourself."

"Ah! then at present she's free. Keep her so; we may want her. There have been times when ten thousand would have made my fortune, and there may be again. Any more good qualities?"

"True as steel."

"That depends on the temper," said he, "but in your hands——"

"You make me play a hard part."

"There is not one woman in a thousand so

capable of doing it," and in appealing to Mathilde's vanity as an actress he knew he was touching a responsive chord. "I shall endeavour to see her to make her acquaintance, if the opportunity offers. Never forget that whatever happens, you and I sink or swim together."

A shadow passed over the face of Mathilde, for the metaphor was an unfortunate one, as they then stood, looking over the bridge into the sluggish water that had just appealed so strongly to the feelings of one of them. "And Mrs. Montessor?"

"Will always treat me with consideration. Most women have a weak point, some secret, some antecedent they would fain bury, and——" here Mathilde hesitated for a moment, and Gilbert Ferrers concluded the sentence.

"Are very grateful to the parson who performs the funeral service by laying the ghost and burying the body. I'm not curious. As to ourselves, we had better not be seen together here. If we are, you have a brother, I presume?"

"Not that I know of, Gilbert."

"Then try and make one for the occasion," and Gilbert laughed unconcernedly.

"It will be easier to avoid suspicion. To do which we must part. My letters are always safe, addressed as before; but not your name. The initials are unnecessary. We shall meet before you return to England. If you want money, I will do my best; but remember that a German governess is not a millionaire." Mathilde said these words with a gaiety which was far from real; and then looking stealthily round she imprinted one warm passionate kiss on his lips, and drawing down her veil walked hastily away.

The impression on Gilbert's mind was scarcely so pleasant as the one on his lips. He had no fancy for being loved passionately, and his beautiful face for a moment assumed a mixed expression of wonder and annoyance. But he soon recovered himself, and remained standing where she had left him looking down into the water below the prison walls. "Gloomy," said he at last to himself, "d——d gloomy; what a tryst! And yet what a woman it is! It's impossible to help loving such a brain as that;

and I do love her, more than I ever loved anything but myself; and I'd marry her if I thought we could hunt in couples; but two such highly-bred hounds would only break the couples at the first disagreement, and both be lost into the bargain."

Mathilde retreated as quickly as she could, and reached home as the darkness began to make itself felt.

She said truly her lover was trying her hard. Why had he followed her here? Certainly with no view beyond some selfish gratification of his own. And the most favourable construction she could put on his movements was the pleasure of seeing herself. Even that was doubtful now; for he had given her reason to believe that her *protégée*, although unknown to him, possessed that curious attraction for him which could scarcely have grown up entirely for the sake of her small fortune. The truth was that the report of her beauty had reached him, at the same time with the assurance of her independence, and he had satisfied himself of the truth of the former by a personal inspection. He was, like all such men, attracted by physical

beauty; and regarding as a distant possibility the necessity of marrying to compass the possession of her ten thousand pounds, he was not averse to its being accompanied by good looks.

If Mathilde von Robeck could be of no more use to him, she could at least assist him in this. How, he had not thought it necessary to inquire; but the lion does not lie down with the lamb without acquiring some sort of power over it. What it might be, or how it might be exercised, was at present very undefined; and perhaps the question was too gross an one even for Gilbert Ferrers to propose to himself solemnly, with the results at a distance. Looking closely at it, it was ugly enough. The employment of the bad passions of the woman you profess to love in forwarding your views upon another whose fortune you covet! It has indeed a bad appearance when put in this unmistakable language. It is very bad, yet I doubt whether a man, brought up as Gilbert Ferrers had been, would have hesitated to employ any means for his end which his courage or capacity could suggest. Of the co-operation of Mathilde he felt certain, for as

he had no *arrière pensée* of love for Myra Gray, it never entered his head to suppose that Mathilde would be governed by any scruples.

On two things he did not calculate. He forgot that she was sure to jump to the conclusion at which he had not arrived, and to attribute, at least in some measure, to affection an interest in her pupil which only arose from more sordid motives; and he did not understand that any love for Myra Gray could exist on the part of Mathilde which could possibly interfere with the passion she felt for him.

And in fact, as regards its intensity, he was right; but he did not know that the two forms of affection might exist, and often do, coequally and coevally, without jostling one another, till a time of antagonism arrives, and it becomes necessary to decide between the two. Even then it is not the strongest that always triumphs; for there are men and women of strong feelings who are not governed by them; but whose strength of character and generous sentiments are seen most in the subjugation of their own feelings, and who would always sacrifice a passion to a sense of duty, be it

ever so strong. It is true that neither Gilbert Ferrers nor Mathilde had been much in contact with, nor could they appreciate, such persons; certainly when the antagonistic principle began to make itself felt the weakest would go to the wall. We may therefore naturally conclude that if ever Mathilde von Robeck be asked to sacrifice her friend and her pupil to the interests of her lover, if he puts on pressure, she will do so. Virtue will have but one ally, a strong and persistent jealousy; if he succeed in allaying or killing that, a dozen Myra Grays would be sacrificed by such a woman as Mathilde.

The truth is that in such a woman her sense of a lover's duty outweighs all other motives, prudential or otherwise, and in sheer selfish devotion she goes headlong to destruction, carrying everything and everybody with her, without remorse or consideration. Her conduct depends simply upon the intensity of her feelings; and as far as can be seen, Myra Gray stands no chance by the side of Gilbert Ferrers.





CHAPTER VII.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE PALACE BALL.

SCHLAGSTEIN, as it was the seat of government, so also was it the seat of fashion; but of German government and of French fashion. Manners were as formal and unbecoming as bonnets were informal and colours becoming. The virtues of the Schlagsteiners were their own, their tastes were purely Parisian. Not that it signified at all. We do the same in England, and did in the days of which I write; but it did not lessen our respect for British conventionality. Since then we have adopted a foreign tone of manners too.

Myra Gray and Mathilde sat over their coffee and butterbrod about three days before the coming ball. The youngerlings of Mrs. Mon-

tressor's establishment were *coram magistris*, as we said in the Eton Latin Grammar, before their masters. It was that the little countesses might benefit by the lessons of Herr Strummelfinger, and that the Palatinate princesses might learn calisthenics and dancing at eighteen kreutzers a lesson, that they were sent to Schlagstein, and now they were profiting by the opportunity.

Mrs. Montessor herself guarded them with a watchful eye, not eyes; for she distributed the two equally between the two professors. She knew the world, and what a world of sentiment and sympathy was contained in a discord by that intelligent finger; what an electric thrill of ecstasy ran through the veins from the ankle to the heart in that delicately enforced *pose* of Signor Apollo Farnese. How she knew these things I do not know, but clever women have instincts, and your fine women of uncertain antecedents sometimes have experience more valuable than theory.

"Fräulein von Eberstein's hand is a little fatigued, liebe Herr," said the mistress of the establishment to the professor of music, as she saw that that gentlemen felt it necessary to

relieve the monotony of teaching by placing the young lady's hand too frequently upon the keys. "Suppose we give up our lesson for this morning. Fräulein, do me the favour to send la petite Louise to take her music lesson."

La petite Louise was just ten years old, so even Mrs. Montessor felt quite safe on her account, and might give both her eyes to the manipulation of the magnificent Italian professor of deportment.

"Thank you, Signor Farnese; do me the favour to show the Princess von la Roche de Corbeau von Mittelältern the position once more. She is remarkably quick at imitation, and will learn more rapidly than by any other means."

Signor Apollo Farnese ground his teeth beneath his dark moustache, and the very slightest blush suffused the Princess's cheek—he was beyond that—as he released her well-rounded, but not taper, ankle so peculiarly German from his not delicate grasp, and resumed his own position in front of his pupils. Mrs. Montessor continued to look on from the chair in which she had seated herself, perfectly satis-

fied that she had done her duty, and that the professor knew it. The young Princess was sixteen, and what a pretty thing a runaway match would have been with a posture-master for the reputation and profit of a house like that of Mrs. Montessor!

“Who’s making your dress, Myra—Madame Baptiste or Frau Kirschenband?”

“Neither, Mathilde. Madame Baptiste has too much to do, and Madame Kirschenband has no idea how to do what she has,” said Myra, sipping her coffee.

“I thought Madame Baptiste fitted you so well; and a regular customer would surely have been attended to if you had applied soon enough.”

“I did not apply soon enough. And when I decided on my dress I also decided that no French woman in Schlagstein should make it.”

“Then where in the world is it being made?” said Mathilde von Robeck, in some alarm. For she began to think that her own leading-strings were being extended too loosely, and that her *protégée* was becoming a little too independent.

She was mistaken, and, like the rest of the world, was only meeting her troubles half-way.

"I said no *French* woman in Schlagstein. It's being made by a German. Do you remember when we were walking near the Pfälzer Hof we went into a shop to match some steel buttons, full of curious antiquities—silks, satins, helmets, sham jewellery, armours, and mediæval bijouterie? Well, Mathilde, I am going in for the mediæval, and I have employed that old Jewess to make me a dress."

"But you know nothing about her."

"That's not the question. Does she know anything about the dress, is."

"And who are you to be, one of your own beauties, Myra, or one of ours? Is it to be Isabella of Bavaria, to leave those pretty shoulders of yours exposed? or is it——"

"Mathilde!" and the exclamation was accompanied with an expression of wonder natural beyond all power of affectation.

"Or is it to be," and Mathilde von Robeck would not be stopped, "that other Isabella, whose lace has made your point lace valuable

for its dinginess ever since the siege of Ostend?"

"Neither. It is to be an English beauty."

"One of Sir Peter Lely's? I have seen them at Hampton Court."

"Never, Mathilde, not I, with their patches, and paint, and nakedness."

"I forgot, we have all become less modest as we have become more modern, Myra, and your tastes are mediæval. The Queen of your gallant Edward III."

"Philippa!" said Myra, laughing. "I—I look it, don't I? Besides, she was of Hainault. No; what do you think of Mary Queen of Scots?"

"And the handsome Darnley, who will be your Darnley, think you?"

"Who indeed? Why that's one reason why I have chosen it. No one is to know; and as these Germans of yours know nothing about our history, I shall escape their persecution at least."

"And yet you may find a Darnley," replied Mathilde, with a curious expression of face almost prophetic, and, seeing Myra's large eyes, she added a very natural explanation, "You

forget that Schiller has made Marie Stuart as much German as English, that we have learned to read Walter Scott, who has given her a Darnley to the full as unfortunate and as accomplished as herself; and not less adapted for a fancy dress."

"That's all he was fit for, Mathilde, they used to tell me; but I don't know much about him, and I'm sure nobody will take him. They are all going as devils, or Wallensteins, or knights, or Ruperts, or Oxensteirns, whoever they were, old Lady de Horsemann tells me. My old Jewess has a beautiful dress in hand for me, and she has all the necessary ruffs, and jewels, and cap for Mary Stuart. I went there alone. You see I couldn't tell Mrs. Montessor or you without letting you know my dress."

"Of course not. I hope you saw nothing very remarkable on your visit."

"Nothing and nobody. But do you remember the day we went to the shop? We saw a young man walking on the other side of the street. I've seen him once since, Mathilde."

"That's not extraordinary. I suppose he stopped here a few days. Who is he?"

"It's the face that I saw when we were coming away from England. I told you of it at the time."

"Yes; so you did. I forgot all about it. Handsome, you said, I think?"

"Handsome? beautiful, Mathilde. I never could get him out of my head."

"Nonsense, Myra. You'll see some one at this ball of yours."

"But not an Englishman; and nothing like him. I wish you had seen him, Mathilde."

"I'm glad I didn't, you little stupid, if it was to have the same effect upon me that it has upon you. Why your head's turned already."

"Not quite, Mathilde; but as soon as I've been down to Herr Strummelfinger, you shall go with me to the Jewess and look at the dress."

So in the afternoon they went, and they both pronounced it everything that was becoming to the large brown eyes and light hair and beautifully chiselled features of Myra Gray.

It is true that the Court divided its custom between Madame Baptiste and the respectable Frau Kirschenband. The great French division

favoured the former; it certainly comprised the majority of the aristocracy, for the Grand Duchess herself was one-third a Frenchwoman, and encouraged French manners and morals which were indifferent, and French toilettes which were better. A strong German party, however, stood up for their countrywoman, and in behalf of their patriotism dressed worse and ate more than the other. This party was divided into a few of the very highest stern old descendants from the stern old ages of chivalry and the pure Germanic element, the shopkeeping and professorial department, which forms the staple of all towns on the Continent with one exception, the Hague. The Hague is the most aristocratic community with which I have ever been acquainted.

In the present case Madame Baptiste had the best of it. For the commercials and professors were out of it, and the very high party could be but a small one.

By about half-past eight the same evening the small antiquarian shop in the Jews' quarter, near the Pfälzer Hof, was invaded by a stranger. He was no stranger to us, nor indeed

to the old Jewess, Frau Simon herself; but he was not a countryman, nor in any way an *habitué*, of Schlagstein. He was no other than Gilbert Ferrers.

"How now, my good Madame Simon?" said Gilbert, smiling good-humouredly, and puffing out a volume of smoke from his cigar. "I know this is not disagreeable in your country, though I doubt whether our countrywomen would be equally tolerant." He spoke in French with moderate facility, not waiting to measure his faults, but wading through them; a method of talking, especially in French, which effects its purpose better than the strictest grammar. Madame Simon, though a German Jewess, had lived long in the Rue de la Ferme des Maturins, and appreciated it accordingly.

"Don't mention it, sir. You are smoking a good cigar too. All our young men do not the same."

"That's only because they can't get them," replied Gilbert Ferrers, with a little swagger, leaning over the counter between them. "It's only a question of money."

Madame Simon looked up approvingly, feel-

ing that most things in this world were only a question of money.

"I daresay you are right, sir. There's a deal of difference between Schlagstein and Paris, in the way of money. But, ye see, my husband's German, and he won't see it in the way I do. If there's less extravagance among the gentle-folks, there's less money for us poor people to pay. 'When noblemen ruins themselves,' says he, 'it's the tradesfolk as pays the piper.'"

"Well, it's true, dame."

"True, sir! Yes, it's, may be, true; but it's paltry. Here's this ball; it's a fine thing for some, but it will do no good. Everything will be as cheap as can be, and those who can afford to pay for a good costume will get it from Paris."

"But you, surely, have not been overlooked. Your daughter's a clever girl, and you've half the material ready at hand," said he, taking up a frill and ruff from off the counter. "Now I could almost swear that this formed part of a costume which would appear at the palace."

The old woman continued to work, but held her tongue, a proceeding which might be

imitated with great effect upon other occasions, as well as a masked ball. "But it belongs to a dress and a period that you know nothing about," added he, "it's Marie Stuart. I should like to see a woman here that could wear it." Frau Simon did not reply. "Indeed, I don't suppose any one could make it up; no one knows the period."

"Oh, yes. I could make it up," said madame, surprised out of her coolness.

"Perhaps you could. But which of your German women could wear it?"

"There may be others than Germans who can."

"French women, possibly. But there are none."

"What do you think of English, monsieur? But, there, I have said enough." And she had; for Gilbert Ferrers began turning over some curiosities; and, after buying a trifle, took off his hat politely and departed. But the next morning he went back.

"Madame Simon, you say you know the costume of our Marie Stuart. Are you equally learned in that of her husband, Darnley?"

The old Jewess stood on a chair, and reaching down an old book of engravings, showed them to Gilbert Ferrers. "That is the dress. White velvet and gold. Expensive. But, if well made, we should take it again at nearly the same price. But who's to wear it?"

"Suppose I do so. Will you make it for me at once?"

"We have but scant time."

"That's not the question. Can you do it?"

"And the expense?" said the Jewess.

"That's my business. Will you do it, Madame Simon?" And Gilbert Ferrers put on his best smile.

"I can, and I will. Monsieur Simon," said she, calling, "come in and take this gentleman's measure." And while her assistant-husband did so, she descanted on the beauties of cut velvet and gold lace, with a gusto purely Parisian.

"And for whom shall we make this dress? And where can it be sent to?" said Monsieur Simon, awake to the commercial part of the speculation. Gilbert Ferrers looked up, as if taken aback for a moment.

“Ah, I forgot. You know secrecy is a great point in these matters; and if it became known that I was to appear as Darnley, the point of it would be lost. Silence, therefore, my good folks, and depend upon me. I shall want a domino and half-mask; but I will fetch them myself, or send on the evening.” Saying which he stayed no longer questioning, but retreated, leaving Monsieur and Madame Simon lost in astonishment at the easy termination of the affair.

“That’s a *mauvais sujet*, wife, depend upon it,” said the old man, at length. “I’m glad he didn’t fall in love with the Milan suit. He would have done so, if he had wanted to play Francis the First or the Emperor.”

“He’s a nobleman, Simon, depend upon it. To hear him talk about money, he must have lived in society all his life. Here’s a rix-thaler he gave me to hold my tongue.”

“Then do so.” Saying which old Monsieur Simon walked off.





CHAPTER VIII.

MATHILDE REFLECTS WHILE OTHERS DANCE.

THE combination of the True and False, Nature and Art, was better understood in Germany than elsewhere, as it appears in the dance. I believe, in the days of which I write, the noble Schlagsteiners had a thoroughly innocent enjoyment in the ball-room. Its meretricious accidents were almost beyond or beside their contemplation. What even was the music to those blue and silver heroes, excepting as it was exceptionally good, and Tanz-music above all things? The sparkling gems, the flashing eyes, the braided hair, the banquet, the light, the garlands, the swanlike bosoms, all but the “many-twinkling feet” themselves were regarded as the accessories to pleasure; but not the pleasure itself.

Byron might have learnt a lesson of self-restraint from this golden age of ball-rooms ; where he could have seen each of his allurements give place to the innocuous gratification of moving gracefully. They loved dancing for itself, both men and women. There were no idlers or loungers in those *salons*, but such as were physically incapable of sharing its active pleasures.

It was not odd, therefore, that on the morning and during the day of the Grand Duchess's *fête* the usually silent Rue Royale of Schlagstein should re-echo with the occasional sound of wheels, which either set down their loads of women and bandboxes at the hotels, public and private, of that city, or were to be found standing in front of the various *modistes*, notably of Madame Baptiste and Frau Kirschenband, while their occupants cheapened the modest finery to be met with there. For your true Schlagsteiner was an economist. Paris fashions, Paris luxuries, and Parisian indifference to reputation had not yet infected him. A virtuous, if somewhat foolish, habit of paying his way was a strong point with your Rheinlander ; and if a gold band for the

incompressive waist of madame cost fifteen kreutzers more than it ought, madame must go without or the seller must abate his demands, to meet the modest income of monsieur.

Honesty and dancing then went together; but civilisation, and that happy rapidity of locomotion which jumbles us all up together, French, Russians, Germans, Poles, Danes, English, Cretes, and Arabians (O my prophetic soul! I write this before the Conference), has increased our comforts and intelligence at the expense of our respectability.

I have the highest regard for that Teutonic taste for honesty, of which we ourselves claim a tithe; especially in the matter of paying our debts. "He that steals my purse steals trash." Well, possibly if it have nothing in it; but to get my bread, beef, beer, butter, bedsteads, and blankets with them, or anything else representing a marketable value, without any equivalent return, is not the right thing to do. Novels were not intended as vehicles for unwholesome truths, but rather for that easily digested and toothsome bit which belongs especially to the *cuisine* of fiction. If I pursued this subject to its

obvious end, I might well be accused of inserting the thin end of the wedge of a sermon. But I lived among these people for a length of time. They have their vices, like the rest of us ; but the very highest aristocracy of the country made a point of living within its income, sometimes very narrow limits.

The preparations for the ball at the palace were on the highest scale of magnificence, consistent with this old-fashioned principle, of cutting one's coat according to one's cloth ; a purely mercantile metaphor, as the reader will perceive, and pointing to a low origin. The rooms, in themselves, wanted nothing but brilliant lighting, and flowers, more difficult in that country than in our own, where extravagant conservatories do the duty of a climate ; and it must be conceded that if the Ducal Palace is fine, it is neither an Eaton nor a Chatsworth. Still, it was grand enough for its purpose, and adapted for the display of the costumes which were to assemble in it at a later hour.

The town itself was gone mad on the subject ; and its idle thousands had determined to participate in some of the enjoyment prepared

for their betters. They would go forth about eight (for the Schlagsteiners were sensible as well as thrifty) and see as much of the wonders of high life as their very aristocratic neighbours would allow. Consequently, in the dark and damp evening of an early December, away they tripped. The happy burghers, and their wives, and daughters; the innkeepers and hostesses; the tradesmen and shopboys; and such a crowd of roistering *gamins* as may be found in all cities, in spite of the voluntary compulsory system of education. A neighbouring university, too, poured its idle masses of student life into the gates of the palace, forgetful for the moment of political rivalry, and of their deep-seated dreams of fatherland and German nationality.

The vehicles, which began to pour out their occupants, were not quite up to the pattern of St. James's and the Tuileries. Ministers of State came, it is true, in ponderous carriages of wondrous manufacture, drawn by high-stepping Hanoverians, or North-German horses. Provincial princes and counts arrived by slow but certain steps in country-built landaus, which would have astonished Courtenay, and caused

a shudder to the refined taste of Peters or of Shanks. The majority rolled up in *fiacres* of many shapes, according to requirements; and not a few presented themselves on horseback or on foot, recalling to an Englishman's mind the pageantry of a Charles or a James. Sedans were not wanting, and *flambeaux* gleamed along the causeway as the runners set down their loads in haste, and returned to secure a second or a third fare; so great was the demand for locomotives beyond the supply. The palace was long ago alive with light, and already the cheerful tones of the Tanz-music began to be heard.

"Ach, Jansen, *wie schön*, how beautiful!" said Frau Jansen to her husband, pressing forward to get a glimpse of a lovely face, which careless, or considerate for the longings of the crowd, neglected to put up her mask, and allowed the people to look at her pretty features. "And the dress! Look at her ruff, and the lace, and velvet!"

"Marie Stuart," observed Jansen, who was a man of few words. At the same moment the guard directed the servant to the rooms of the

Countess de Horsemann, for whom he inquired ; the *fiacre* driving away by the orthodox route designed by a soldier on duty.

"Ah, Henpeck, here's a figure!" cried the little wife of Professor Henpeck. "Here's a funny figure! truly it is laughable." And the woman was right; for from the interior of a sedan, in which there seemed scarcely room for him to have been stowed away, there stalked, in solemn majesty, a huge cock. It was a splendid imitation, and was received with shouts of welcome by the multitude.

"Ha! ha! ha! My old friend, the Baron Chopstick," said one in the crowd. "The Baron is scarcely at home in his borrowed plumes."

"He'll be more at home in the morning, Hans," replied his friend, as the Baron gave a cheerful crow, to the delight of the spectators, and followed the direction of the servants.

"Whom have we here? Do you know him, Malchen? You know everybody."

"Not I," says Malchen. "Nor I," says another, standing by the first speaker; and there stepped lightly from a hired carriage a very handsome

young man, dressed in some measure differently from those who had gone before. His costume was neither German nor fantastic.

"I know him now, but dress changes him, he wears no beard nor moustache generally. He is the handsome Englishman who lodges at old Fräulein Grubenheim's in the Kirchen Strasse." And as she spoke Frau Jansen turned again to her husband, and asked what dress he had on.

"You have read your Schiller, Frau, and know your Marie Stuart when you see her?"

"Certainly," said Frau Jansen with some degree of pride, and in a tone which impressed her neighbours with the claims of a professor's wife.

"And that is of the same epoch: a Scotch cavalier—Darnley; and see, he wears the colours of his lady-love, black and orange. They were an ill-matched and ill-fated pair." And the professor struck a fresh piece of tinder and lighted his pipe, for there were no fusees in those days, even in the land of pipes.

"I think the ill-fated one is Fräulein Grubenheim," murmured an old gossip to her neighbour in an undertone. "The Englishman

has been with her a fortnight, and she has not yet seen the colour of his money. A fortnight, my good dame, and you know our custom is for one week only. Besides, he lives in the house, and visits no *table-d'hôte* or other public place of resort. I have seen him only by accident when I have been there."

"Then the *table-d'hôte* is a gainer: but see, he is stopping." And at the very time the old woman was discussing his mode of life, a tall figure broke through the crowd, and passing the line of sentries addressed him in a whisper. The soldiers and servants did not interfere, seeing that the two were known to one another, and the woman, who was disguised in a long cloak, and whose dark veil hid her features, took a note from her breast, and gave it to the young man, speaking lowly and emphatically in English. Then she turned on her heel, and walked towards the gate, while Gilbert Ferrers, with some embarrassment, made his way into the Palace, holding the note firmly with one hand, and presenting his card of admission with the other. The flambeaux made it as light as day round the Palace doorway, but none recognised

Mathilde von Robeck, but he for whom the note was intended.

Thus continued for a length of time the stream to flow on. As some great man was occasionally recognised in his diplomatic uniform, or through his flimsy disguise of character, a murmur would run through the crowd, but nothing beyond it. Laughter broke out sometimes as a ridiculous figure presented itself, or some ludicrous incident occurred. But in general the crowd was decorous, and only gave breath to its witticisms in whispers, or to a small circle of auditors, as we have seen. "Ah! what red and gold! It is the English officer of the guard who is to be married to the Countess Adela von Himmeldorf. He is a lord and very rich."

"All the English are lords and rich."

"To be a lord is to be rich in England," said Frau Jansen, again with a determination to keep up her easily-earned reputation.

"Well said," murmured the crowd.

"And to be rich is to be a lord—everywhere," said the professor, who had learnt human nature from the Latin poets.

"Better still," murmured the crowd; and as

they thought of this last axiom and turned it over, a heavy carriage drew up, and there came out of it one Mephistopheles, or a devil, having horns and hoofs, and a tail: he was party-coloured too, black and red. There had gone many devils before, but not so good, or bad, as he.

"Ah! what is he?" said the crowd.

"Something to fly away with all rich lords," said a student.

"And to establish German nationality," said another.

"The true representative of Democracy," cried a third.

"The friend of the poor," murmured a fourth who could not see.

"And the enemy of all abuses," replied his friend.

"The Devil!" roared one of the crowd, at which they all laughed, excepting the professor; who puffed forth his smoke valiantly, and seemed to doubt, upon consideration, whether it was such a laughing matter after all.

In the course of an hour or more the Grand Ducal Palace was full of empty heads and light heels. Perhaps the heels were light because the

heads were empty ; but of this I cannot speak positively.

Let us follow Mathilde, while Strauss enchants his hearers for a time, and the Grand Duke and the Grand Duchess receive their guests. It is no easy matter to satisfy the prejudices and etiquette of a court, but if it could be done anywhere, it was to be done at Schlagstein.

Mathilde von Robeck walked quickly and unmolested through the deserted streets, and was soon in her own room. It was deficient in the luxuries and even comforts of an English lady's bedroom ; but that was more an accident of the country in which she lived than of her position in the house of Mrs. Montessor. Had she not been more English than German herself, she would never have perceived the difference ; as it was, she scarcely regretted it. Even in small matters Mathilde's was a great mind, a large mind, not a good or well-regulated one, as may be supposed. She looked round at the three chairs, one of which was a wooden arm-chair, and she threw herself into it. She took in at once the little round table, with the common book-shelves and plainly bound books on it, the

square piece of common carpet which covered only the centre of the room, and the plain bedstead, white curtains, cold in colour as in texture, and the painted washing-stand. The stove threw an agreeable warmth through the apartment, but the cheerfulness of an English coal fire would have been worth more, if it only heated an eighth part of the room.

“It would have been better in England,” said the girl to herself, “in a commercial academy at Clapham; but what of it! A carpet, a chair, a curtain, more or less, what is it? There is but little to wish for between the bare necessities of life and splendid luxury. One chair is as good as another, unless one can roll in eider-down cushions and rose-coloured silk. There is enough to satisfy want in a warm and well-made merino, but O for the substantial power of velvet and diamonds.”

“Aut Cæsar, aut nullus,” was the girl’s sentiment; but she did not say so in the same language. She had come home to think, and the wooden arm-chair, handsomely carved at the back, possibly gave an energy to her imagination. She did not fall asleep.

“Money! what I have is too little to be of use to me. Let him have it. It is but a venture; and if he becomes rich, I shall have its substantial enjoyments. He has told me so a hundred times. He wants it now to go to England. And why not? here his energies are dying, and our only chance in life is being lost. Love him! indeed I do; but I love luxury with him, and without wealth we should only go tumbling down together. Myra Gray is no use to me. I cannot get her fortune; if I had it, I could make no use of it. He can. But he can only get it by a marriage, as I understand him: a marriage he cares nothing about: for he does not love her, nor can he understand her.”

Here it is but right to say she was wrong. Gilbert Ferrers really loved neither the one nor the other. He had a passion, dangerous, devilish; and his fancy was as much for Myra Gray with her money, as for Mathilde without it. He had as little principle as she had, and he would have used either to serve his purpose, as he afterwards did both. The injury he would do Mathilde by not marrying her was no greater

than that he would do Myra by marrying her. For Mathilde had no principle, no sentiment, no religion, no veneration even for established conventionalities: and Myra had all that would have made a good husband, a happy home, a virtuous family, and the sacred name of wife and mother her Heaven upon earth.

Thus Mathilde in her wickedness and abandonment continued to indulge her reflections, of which she was proud, while the Grand Duchess was enjoying her revel. "If I could be that indeed, or live as she and many of her guests do live, the name of wife might have a charm for me, for it would be associated with power and influence; but to be an affair like that humdrum Frau von Stecknadel or Baroness Geduld, whose whole strength lies in her capability of knitting her husband's shooting stockings, and her whole virtue in never contradicting him, and in living in a half-furnished country house, with a one-horse landau for a locomotive. Bah! better be anything that shines and glitters, and leads men here, there, and everywhere, to good if possible" (she did well to put in the possible!), "but anywhere rather than not to lead at all.

Gilbert must marry money, and power, if he can do so. Myra might give him a small fortune, and her guardian must find the latter; he is a man to improve both of them, and I?—well, I should be the last to stand in his way.”

With some such diabolical reflections as these on women’s social status and uses in this world, Mathilde von Robeck laid her head upon the pillow. It was a very beautiful head when it was there, but very much of the panther kind. She dreamt of her lover, of his prospects and career; and, had she been more of a woman and less of a demon, would even then have repented of the part she had determined to play. For it will be observed that she was not one of those who would fall from weakness, and to whose perilous and downward course human pity may be extended; but one whose very strength and boldness urged her to walk deliberately into vice, enamoured of the audacity of the modern Aspasia, and blind to the degradation of her fall. When Myra returned from the Palace, she looked at her sleeping friend, and loth to disturb her, passed on into her own chamber, a room on which Mrs. Montessor had expended some

greater care, if no very much larger sum of money, than on that of her younger pupils.

While Mathilde had been indulging her reverie, the Palace gaieties had proceeded *selon les règles* of a court as exclusive and as aristocratic as that of Schlagstein. Aides-de-camp had run hither and thither in search of the right partners for Princess Berthe and the other young ladies of royal birth or descent, who could only dance with bears of their own blood. In these cases masks and dominoes had to be laid aside, and the *contre danse* formed of reputed and reputable dames and cavaliers. The hand of Marie Stuart had been asked and obtained on many occasions by the young Schlagsteiners to whom she was known. The English guardsman had been favoured with an introduction, and had claimed acquaintance with Myra on the score of his knowledge of her guardian and his daughters. He gave her authentic intelligence of their doings at Melton and in Ireland. Her hand had been claimed by Darnley, who had worn his mask during the waltz, but who on bowing his acknowledgments had appeared unintentionally to remove it. The effect was, as

might be expected, electrical. Myra at once discovered the handsome stranger whom she had seen on leaving London ; and her suspicions were placed beyond a doubt that she had seen him subsequently in Schlagstein. Could she refuse him a second dance later in the evening ? Certainly not. The blue and silver heroes in all kinds of costumes, Spanish grandees, harlequins, fools, court-jesters, Templars, Wallensteins, Hartz-Mountain demons, Swiss peasants, and matadors, had danced with every description of heroine, queen, princess, shepherdess, Tyrol-lienne, with Day and Night and all the Seasons. The cock and Mephistopheles had found a vacant whist table, and were engaged against a Prussian diplomatist and a Spanish mendicant friar. The latter had far the best of it, though they were opposed by the Devil and the early bird. In a word, the ball was in full vigour while Mathilde was sleeping the apparent sleep of innocence, and dreaming a dream of her first and only love. Pity that so noble a passion should be so frequently the parent of so much that is enervating and destructive.



CHAPTER IX.

MYRA'S DANGER AT THE PALACE BALL. GILBERT TO THE RESCUE.

WE must go back a little to relate an incident which occurred on this memorable evening, and which quickened an event which, but for it, might have remained for a length of time in abeyance or have gone out altogether. By this means my readers might not have been deprived of a story, but they certainly could not have had this one.

We have told how on alighting from his *fiacre* Gilbert Ferrers had been mysteriously presented with a little *billet*. Ushered as der Graf Darnley from one officer of the household to another (and there were enough of them for a dozen court balls at St. James's or the Tuileries), and

eventually presenting his credentials to the Chamberlain, Gilbert had almost forgotten the note which he still held in his left hand. So absorbed was he by the brilliancy of the scene, and the unexpected nature of his reception (for he had not had much to do with the regal festivities hitherto), he had almost presented his letter instead of his invitation card to the Chamberlain himself. He perceived his error in time, and returned to himself, a company he seldom quitted for long together.

He had so much natural grace of manner and such a very handsome face, that when he lowered his mask and bowed lowly to the important personages who were assembled on and about the dais, an almost universal movement of admiration ran through the crowd. There are distinguished-looking Germans, but they are few, and notably from the precincts of Vienna and large capitals; bespeaking thereby a polish and education of person which is more acquired than natural. But there were few among the Schlagsteiners.

When Darnley made his bow the Grande Duchesse, and the Princess Berthe, and the

young Freifräulein of the Palatinate, with their subordinates, felt much as a child at an extravaganza. They hoped the unknown prince might be one of them, but were not sure about the matter. They had no acquaintance with him, and he was not of the blue and silver legion ; beyond which their imagination might travel, but not their cognizance. "How tall!" whispered one. "How well formed!" said another. "What a leg!" thought a third, for etiquette never allowed such expressions as these; and "as high-bred almost as any guardsman" would have said the Princess Berthe, but that she knew nothing truly great under sixteen quarterings ; and short of proof Gilbert had but four.

No sooner had he backed himself out of the august presence, than, closing his hand more tightly upon his note, he sought a corner in which to read its contents. Not an easy thing to find in a Gothic *salle*, with its grand roof and beautiful mullioned windows ; its suits of glittering armour, the spoils of the wars or the chase of Germany of every epoch from the earliest known period of chivalry. Light

indeed there was, but no corner ; solitude such as he required was not in that crowd. So out he went by a long passage, which was as dark as the room he had left was light, and where he could only have lost himself but for the friendly flambeau of a court servant. With few words, which the man did not understand quite so well as a personal arrest, he read the following words in the daring type of Mathilde von Robeck:—"You set me a hard task—but success now depends upon yourself—to-night almost you may have the promise, certainly the prospect, of the result you court. But take care ; she is a prize which needy Schlagsteiners would unwillingly relinquish. But for their respect for a phantom, my countrymen would be the most mercenary of lovers ; German nobility is very self-sacrificing where money is concerned. Watch your victim." He lit the note by the flambeau. A hard task ! indeed it must have been : to hand over the man you love, and who, you believe, loves you, to the embraces of so many thousand pounds, in the Three per Cents. ; a male Danæ to a female Jove. Yes, sordid lover,—

"Mutato nomine de te
Fabula narratur."

No wonder Mathilde was unable to shake off her reveries till long into the night. Strange that she should at last sleep on the very horns of the altar she had raised for her self-sacrifice!

When Gilbert Ferrers returned to the great hall of the palace, he found himself in a crowd of such motley appearance as our readers can well conceive for themselves, where not only all nations, but all times and tastes, all costumes and all ideas of costumes seemed to have met. They were opening the ball with a Polonaise, which swept from the top of the room to the farthest end, unfolding itself gracefully and returning towards the dais, on which the Grande Duchess with her court continued to hold her seat. It was really a splendid sight as lords and puppets broke up and mingled with one another, seeking partners for the first quadrille of the ball. The Princess was led out by a Prince of a neighbouring Duchy, who had assumed for the night the brilliant dress of an Hungarian nobleman of the time of Maria Theresa. Her ladies fell to the lot of an equal

number of known counts, barons, or knights of their own position ; while the masses sought to mate themselves with each other as they detected or fancied they detected an acquaintance. At first this was accomplished with some little difficulty ; but as the evening wore on, and the heat of the rooms became greater, masks were less *de rigueur* ; and partners settled down to the work of love-making and dancing with greater zest, as the Lucretian theory of fitness of things became more developed.

Already had Gilbert Ferrers danced with Myra Gray. At first as a stranger assuming some liberty on the score of their dresses. Then as an Englishman, who had changed his language from French at once, hoping that his fair mask could answer him in his own tongue, however imperfectly. "He, alas! was but a poor Frenchman, and a still worse German." And when at length they adjourned to the supper-room and met face to face, great was his assumed joy at the pretended recognition.

Myra was, I regret to say, disposed to meet the unknown hero of her imagination more than half way. She was one of those girls,—for she

could not yet be called a woman,—whose very truth, earnestness, and simplicity, joined with natural high spirits, exposed her to misrepresentation. If flirting or coquetry mean a malicious tampering with men's feelings for a woman's own gratification, Myra Gray was anything but a flirt. A coquette is essentially untrue. Myra Gray was essentially true; and as that truth of character was unprotected by any worldly wisdom, it might well lead her, as it sometimes did, into foolish surprises. As a girl her actions were so impulsive, that she seemed deficient in consideration. She had plenty for others, none for herself.

Nor had the education she had hitherto received corrected these exemplary faults, if they may be called so. Her Irish training had taught her to conceal nothing of her feeling, to govern nothing of her high spirit. As she felt she spoke; and she now felt very seriously for the first time.

She was in the hands of a very unprincipled, if not very *rusé*, man of the world, considerably her senior in age and experience, of whom her childish hero-worship had made a demigod in

quality as he was in feature. When the mask fell from his face, it was at once transferred to his mind; and she was prepared to enjoy the satisfaction of the one without piercing or analysing the condition of the other. Could a man with such eyes be a hypocrite, or so straight a nose harbour deceit?

"Myra," whispered Gilbert Ferrers, after a charming waltz, "Myra, I—I beg pardon, Miss Gray;" but Myra exhibited no such well assumed surprise or anger as would have been natural in a more artificially-educated lady. "You see I have fallen into a liberty already."

"A liberty!" and she feigned no more than she felt.

"A liberty; yes, Miss Gray; but I have already ascertained the name of one who interested me so much."

She might have wondered where he had ascertained it; but wonder was absorbed in satisfaction. "Oh, it is no liberty; at home all call me Myra. I am accustomed to answer to no other name."

"But I, a stranger," replied Gilbert.

"You do not seem like a stranger, though I

don't know you. We are fellow-countrymen in a foreign land, and it does delight me so to meet my own countrymen." Then she paused, and as if a sudden wish or idea had seized her, she added, "But you have not yet told me your name." There was no timidity about her request, though there certainly would have been in Belgravia or the Faubourg St. Germain.

"Ah, you will scarcely recognise it. It is not Irish."

"Then you know I am Irish." Gilbert Ferrers felt that he had made a slight mistake—much learning had done him a bad turn—not so the girl, who only saw in it a new compliment.

"I fancied so," replied he, recovering himself. "There is a certain charm in your countrywomen, for I see you don't deny it, that is sought for in vain elsewhere. My name is English, and unknown to you—Gilbert Ferrers."

"Do you stay much longer in Schlagstein?"

"I came for two days; I have already been here three or four weeks. Am I likely to leave it now?" and Myra Gray drank in another implied compliment; for it was impossible to mistake the tone of these words, if the words them-

selves would have borne another interpretation. And in this manner Myra Gray felt the night pass happily away in the realisation of what could hitherto have been but a dream.

At length she was claimed for a dance by a true mask; Mephistopheles bowed before her, and led her away.

"Now to follow up my first successes," said Gilbert to himself. "I think the girl is secure if we can manage to make her fortune so too. Mathilde is seldom mistaken, and my information from Ireland is of the best. Her guardian is a peer, and may do much for me under circumstances; but all the peers on the globe can be of no use to me without money."

Meanwhile Myra Gray was dancing with the devil as she thought. She had really exchanged the substance for the shadow.

The evening was getting on. Etiquette had taken to bed the Grand Duke and Duchess, and sundry princes and courtiers connected with that royal house; but with great boldness and disregard of palatial regulations, the younger ladies and gentlemen of the Court had returned to do honour to the dance and the Johannisberg.

Sprightly indeed had become their measures, and Strauss was rousing himself for renewed exertions. It was a good and wholesome custom to make the Palace balls early; but such a ball as this was an exceptional case. No one regarded the spluttering wax in the chandeliers, or the waning lights in the long galleries. They were all intent on pleasure, and the Schlagsteiners seemed never to have had enough.

Madame de Horsemann had remained with her *protégée* as long as she could, and had then been taken to her room by her attendant demoiselle, handing over Myra to the Countess von Elberfeld, under whose protection the girl was well placed.

Madame von Elberfeld had daughters of her own, and looked after them. She had as much suspicion of a detrimental as a Belgravian mother of the period. There were plenty of such wares in the Duke of Schlagstein's cavalry, and she was watching her own chickens, who had already chipped the shell, and were learning to go alone.

Myra's carriage and servant from Mrs. Mon-

tressor's were long in attendance. Three separate times it had served the purpose for which it was intended, and now waited a fourth time for its real owner. Myra Gray knew it was time to go; but felt a strange fascination from the scene. She would not call it the music, the dancing, or the dresses, even to herself. She felt a sort of pleasure in ascribing it to her newly-found friend.

But it was time to go. The Countess of Elberfeld was collecting her daughters, an easier matter than some hour or two ago; and Myra just remembered that she must go first to Madame de Horsemann's apartment for her shawl. In fact, for what English ladies call their wraps. In this case a domino; her mask was even in her hand. It seems the normal condition of a lady-in-waiting, whose rooms are in the Palace, to live at the end of some intricate and interminable passages. It is so in the palaces of Germany no less so than in our own. There are always excellent apartments, roomy and lofty, the latter especially, up a tower or down in a donjon, apart from society, to which one has to be ushered with

the same punctuality on every visit. The way is past finding out. Nobody ever recollects it; and the domestics, if they have no bumps to speak of at the time of engagement, are bound to acquire that of locality.

Madame de Horsemann was no exception to the general rule. She lived quite at the end of the Palace, in rooms that could be approached from devious roads by devious flights of stairs. Myra had been there often enough, but had about as much idea of how to reach them from the great hall, as a London cabman would have of the situation of the Great Mosque if landed from a caique on the shores of the Bosphorus for the first time in his life. They are a sagacious set, and Myra Gray had a talent for observation, but she was not equal to the occasion. She had, however, an overweening confidence in her own knowledge of the situation, and started on her voyage of discovery.

The passages were dimly lighted, for economy was doubly necessary in the details when such an unwonted sacrifice had been made for general effect. Dim lamps shadowed forth walls and passages, so like one another, that

before many minutes Myra was lost in an inextricable labyrinth of staircases and by-paths. She could neither proceed nor retreat with safety, and did a natural, but not very wise thing—she sat down on a step, and began to cry. She had not escaped from the ball-room unnoticed. Mephistopheles himself had watched her, and believed it to be a brilliant opportunity for love-making, or pretending, as the case might be. At all events, he started on the chase with an indistinct notion of how far it would be safe to go with this young English girl. On one thing he was determined; he would gratify his vanity by hearing from her own lips how acceptable he must be to her.

I say from her own lips, because he had heard very often from others, and if the heart speaketh from his own, how inexpressibly flattered the young person would feel at such an honour! He had therefore followed Myra Gray without any more idea of what he was about to do than if he had been following Lord Forester over the vale of Belvoir. The devil walks very gently in the footsteps of his victims, and on this occasion his representative did not belie the

craft. Physically his footfall was as soft and stealthy as the immaterial hunter after souls could have desired.

Myra had not been three minutes in her trying position, and was about, having dried her eyes, to resume her search, when a hand was laid upon her shoulder. The ruff of Mary Queen of Scots almost bristled with anger when she saw, by the dusky glimmer of a single light, that her late partner was again her companion. He addressed her at once with that easy familiarity which is the offspring of too much *Stein wein* and a sense of great self-satisfaction.

"What, mademoiselle, and alone? Surely you are waiting for somebody?" said the gallant gentleman, thinking of himself, and the effect he had probably produced.

"No," replied Myra, shrinking from his bold and assured tones. "I was seeking the apartments of Madame de Horsemann, and I have lost my way."

"Lost your way!" mused he aloud, "lost your way; not an uncommon thing with young ladies in palaces."

"Then, sir, you will show me the Countess's apartments? for I know you are well acquainted with these passages;" and Myra kept her mask to her face.

"Certainly, certainly, my child. But why in such a hurry? There, sit down again, and let me bear you company." Saying which, Mephistopheles laid his hand again on Myra's shoulder.

"Sir," said the girl, jumping as though she had been stung, "leave me immediately. If you are unmanly enough to refuse me your assistance, at least cease to insult me by your presence." And a sense of fear, undefined fear, drew the blood from her cheeks, beneath her mask, and made her shiver as though with cold. Well might she do so in the long ill-furnished corridor.

"Not once to-night, *ma belle*, have I seen your face. Shame to keep such beauty shrouded. One little peep, my English dame," and as he spoke he laid his hand upon hers which held the mask to her face.

Myra gave one little scream, as she struggled to keep him from tearing away the mask; but it was scarcely loud enough to have reached to

the end of the gallery in which she stood. Neither was she desirous of provoking comment on her present situation, if she could only dissuade or escape from her half-tipsy persecutor.

"Sir, you pretend to know me. I am an English lady, under the protection of the Countess von Horsemann. Let me go, I entreat, or show me the way, for I have lost it."

Mephistopheles still held her hand. "Yes, you shall go. I'll show you the way; but my reward. Come, one——" and as he was speaking, he tore down the weak little hand and mask from her lips, and was about to kiss her, when unexpected succour arrived. The cry for help was answered.

There was no time to be lost; and in the very nick of it a light active form issued from a staircase close at hand with a bound. He was in a moment upon the pair. Affairs were desperate; and to save the girl from the attempted impertinence, with one blow he smote the unconscious Mephistopheles behind the ear. He dropped at once, and the released maiden, turning suddenly round, beheld the handsome Englishman,

who had proved a very timely Darnley to Marie Stuart.

Her first impulse was to cling to him for support; but the German, who had dropped as much from surprise as from the force of the blow, was already on his feet, and feeling for his rapier. "A blow! enough, Sir Englishman," and drawing the sword, he would certainly have wounded Gilbert Ferrers, but for that gentleman's quickness of apprehension. He seized the hand which held the hilt, and closing with his adversary, he snapped the blade in two.

"Not here, monsieur, but elsewhere as soon as you like. This is the palace of your sovereign, and this lady requires protection. Monsieur de la Fels, I know you. We cannot settle our differences till this lady is with her friends; or in the ball-room. Do us the favour to show us the way."

With considerable phlegm, and a punctilio, which a tipsy reveller not unfrequently assumes, the Baron de la Fels bowed low. He stuck the upper half of his rapier into the scabbard, looked at his ruffled plumes to see that no

feathers had moulted in the scuffle, and proceeded towards the *salon*, where Myra in sad fear and perplexity sought the Countess von Elberfeld and her daughters. By their assistance, with some difficulty, she got her domino from the apartments of the lady-in-waiting, and taking a very hasty but impressive farewell of Gilbert Ferrers (her little hand trembled in his, and closed on it tenderly), was soon in her own room. She had too much to think about to carry it to Mathilde. First love is too deep for confidence; it likes to be alone.





CHAPTER X.

SATISFACTORY ARRANGEMENTS.

THE grey dawn was breaking after the last night's ball slowly and lazily, and though already light, the sun was not yet visible above the horizon. It hardly looked as if he would swallow up the November mist which was hanging about, and gave a sombre colouring to the scene, whose characteristics were rather those of summer than of winter beauty.

Slowly, however, the mists did begin to rise as a light wind stole through the open glades of the Schlagstein woods, and then to a spectator was presented perhaps the most extraordinary scene on record of a like cruel transaction. I am writing of an event previous to the modifying influence of a Christian woman's

Court upon the civilisation of our own times and country. The extremes of barbarism and courtly polish still met in the deadly encounter, which satisfied the highest notions of honour all over the world, in which there was no difference morally between the tomahawk of the naked savage, the bowie-knife of the world-whipping American, the dagger of the Mexican, the rapier of the Frenchman, and the ever-ready pistol of the true Irish or English gentleman. Death by the hand of a sort of legitimatised assassin was only too honourable for the lower and middle classes, the noble and the gentle, who would have regarded suicide as a Roman virtue, highly exceptional in an honest Englishman, went out invariably to self-immolation—excuse a bull—at the hands of a neighbour or a friend.

Suicide sounds like insanity or cowardice. Murder has vulgar and ignoble associations; but death by duels has a generous, self-sacrificing savour, which ennobled its victims, till the Christian analysers of the nineteenth century in this country took it in hand and laid bare its hideous sophistry.

But we must return from our digression. Like some pantomimic scene the medium slowly rises and discloses six figures composing two equal groups. On the right of the turf-green stage, on which the actors are standing, flows a rapid German river—that river which has been deified by the post-classic national idea, as the Acheulous or the Scamander by those giants of old. “*Sie sollen Ihn nicht haben!*” was the protecting watch-cry of a nation of worshippers. At times it is bright and glancing, gladdening the hearts on its banks with the glint of the summer’s sun or silver moon. Now it is turbid, dark, and gloomy; not with the foreboding that more poetical writers than I might suggest, but with the increasing volume of the late autumnal rains, and the melting of the Swiss snow.

On the left, and far away in endless succession of crowned heights, lies that portion of the forest which belongs to Schlagstein. Here and there it is dark and full of foliage, the evergreen firs and cedars predominating; but in other parts are spread the huge and leafless branches of the larger forest trees, now admitting the grey or leaden light which in summer they so

effectually shut out. The spot of which we are speaking is almost a circular glade or open space in the wood, covered with rank, green grass, damp with the lowness of its situation and the exclusion of much light or wind. From it, however, run other glades and rides, as we call them in the great woodlands of the shires, and up to this identical spot rough roads are made, which are used chiefly in summer for picnics and excursions to this part of the forest of far pleasanter import than the present one. In the distance, indeed, hidden behind the trees, partially at least, stands a *fiacre*, whose shivering horses are cropping the luxuriant herbage, while the driver sleeps on his box after his night's exertions. The calls of nature were more powerful with him than those of curiosity.

There are six figures forming two groups of three persons in each. They are all more or less pale and terribly serious, with which mood their dresses are grotesquely at variance. In the group nearest the river, down to whose banks the space behind them was open, stands a tall, remarkably well-made, and very handsome man. His head is bare, and exposed

hair almost black, somewhat long, and curly, and now dishevelled. His features are beautiful in their outline, and disagreeable in their expression—hard, and cold, and cynical, if not cruel. On the ground at his feet lies, not a hat, but a black velvet cap, with a white heron's feather fastened to it by a large aigrette of stones. They glittered in the grass like a very bunch of eyes. His person was partly enveloped in a black domino, but the right arm and shoulder were bare, and over a slashed doublet of white satin hung a scarlet cloak edged and embroidered with gold. Handsome lace hung from his neck, and all that could be seen of his feet in the grass were the scarlet bows upon his shoes and the white silk stockings, which formed a part of the dress of the wealthiest or most fashionable nobles and courtiers of Elizabeth's time. Silk stockings were a novelty, but not an anachronism, in Darnley.

The person was Gilbert Ferrers.

Next to him, and speaking to him earnestly, but not energetically, was a small, gentlemanly-looking man in the full dress of an officer of the Grenadier Guards. His handsome uniform

stood out against the black domino of his companion in a marked manner. It had been seldom seen in Germany, certainly never in such a position as at present. In place of his bearskin, for the convenience of the ball at which he had been, he wore the undress cap of his regiment, a small cap of dark cloth drawn forward till the peak shaded his forehead and eyes, and concealed all but his lower features, on which an earnest pallor spread itself perceptibly. Under his left arm he carried an ominous-looking oblong box, his right hand rested on the arm of Gilbert Ferrers with a somewhat tenacious grasp.

A little way removed from the two, to whom he occasionally turned, stood a figure dressed as a harlequin. The diamond colours glittered more brightly even than the scarlet of the officer. He was a tall, well-made man, but of a figure somewhat more *embonpoint* than is usual among the amateur harlequins of our country. He was a man of high rank in Schlagstein, the Comte von Rasfeldt. Of his face only the mouth could be seen, the demi-mask of his dress concealing entirely his eyes

and nose; but the mouth gave sufficient evidence of anxiety by the nervous twitching which could be seen on a near approach.

The second group consisted in like manner of persons dressed in fancy dresses, and they were standing some fifty paces apart from those we have already noticed. By far the most remarkable of the three was the person principally concerned in these proceedings. He was a tall man, above the usual height, and exceeding by three or four inches the two men with whom he was now earnestly and energetically conversing. He was the Baron de la Fels, and was dressed in the conventional costume of the German Mephistopheles. His clothes, of black and scarlet cloth, fitted closely to his body, even to his feet. His hat was of black and scarlet velvet, and from the centre there stood erect a white ostrich feather, curled, and bending forward at the top. His face was entirely uncovered; but the peculiar turn of the eyebrows, which had been artificially lengthened and turned up, and the closely-twisted moustache and Henri Quatre which he wore, gave a peculiarly ominous look to his naturally narrow and lengthened face.

His eyes, singularly blue in colour, had attained a cat-like expression by the dark paint which had been applied to the lids above and below; and the saturnine expression had not been lessened by leaving his hair of its natural golden colour. The mixture of dark and fair on the same face added something to its demoniacal expression. The Baron was artistically got up; and the strong contrasts were in his favour as regards the personification of the national Mephistopheles.

A blonde devil is a terrible thing to behold.

In like manner his friends were closely urging, or expostulating with, him. One of these was Von Rottenberg, in the ordinary dress of a Rittmeister of his own regiment. He was handsomely accoutred in the blue and silver of the Schlagstein Cavalry. His long sabre dragged on the ground, as was the fashion in the Rue Royale, and he twirled his long silken moustache as he spoke, with much energy, to his friend. There was more anxiety in Von Rottenberg's face than had been seen there for many a long day.

The third and last of the two groups whom I

shall have to describe, was a court-jester of the reign of Louis XIV. Comte Degencassel was not a modest man, as the Grand Duchess's lady-in-waiting had said. He was not a wise one; but he was a very merry one. In consequence of this he had selected the character of a court-jester for the evening's pantomime. Rarely had he played his part, and his presence here was the very last thing for which he had bargained. He had joked, and danced, and feasted, to his heart's content; and had enjoyed the privileges which his assumed character gave him, till it was doubtful how far license carried the jesters of the seventeenth century. But the invitation he had received at the close of the evening had been sufficient to sober him, and to remind him that fools were called upon to take part in the more serious scenes of the drama of life.

Such was the scene which the slowly-rising curtain of a November morning disclosed. Now how was it brought about?

On rejoining the dancers, already some hours later than the modest revels of a German palace ordinarily permitted, the chief actors in the

scene had been compelled to seek their friends. One's chiefest friends are always called in to attend one's last moments, or to follow us to the grave. The devil went at once, as in duty bound, to the most experienced officer of his regiment.

"Von Rottenberg," said he, in a state of very natural excitement, "I have been struck—a blow from an accursed Englishman——"

"A blow," replied the Rittmeister, "struck—say no more: and you have not yet washed out the stain in blood," and he wrung his hand affectionately. The tears stood in Von Rottenberg's eyes, for he believed in the unsullied honour of the Schlagsteiners. "Who is the man?"

"The Englishman—your friend. I know not his accursed name."

"Enough; if he were my brother he must suffer. And the cause?"

"Ah! never mind the cause; that has nothing to do with it."

"You are right, De la Fels. It has not. Stay here, liebe Degencassel." And then Rittmeister von Rottenberg unfolded his tale, as far as it

would reach, to his friend Degencassel, and enlisted his sympathies in the quarrel of his brother officer. Then he sought Gilbert Ferrers.

At the same time Gilbert Ferrers had gone straight to the young nobleman who wore the uniform of the Guards. He knew only his title ; but in such a case it was no time to stand upon ceremony. He had no idea that anywhere but where he was he might have been assassinated, with small regret for himself and much honour to the assassin. He knew only that a blow once struck in any country, barbarous or civilised, the striker must pay the penalty. His cause was a good one, ostensibly ; and, though the Marquis of Lowestoft would have travelled from Schlagstein to Timbuctoo with a strange Englishman without exchanging a word with him, Gilbert Ferrers knew that, when fighting was the question, he might count upon assistance.

"My lord," said he, arresting the young man as he came from the supper-room, "a thousand pardons, but I am an English gentleman, and I am obliged to seek assistance in a strange country." And he then related as briefly as possible the circumstances of the quarrel.

"A blow has been struck?" said the Marquis, "then you must fight."

"It is inevitable; as was the blow. It gave time for no deliberation. The defence of an English lady from personal insult was the cause."

"An English lady: I saw her, and have danced with her. She is under the protection of the Countess de Horsemann. We mean the same?"

"Precisely. I ask your lordship to arrange a meeting, and to allow me to give your name when I shall be called upon."

"Which will be in a few seconds," said the Marquis, "for I see the devil and his friends now looking for you. But you will want another second; it should be a German."

"I know but one, and he is now with my opponent, the Baron von Rottenberg."

"Good! Then I must do my best for you, Mr. —;" here the Guardsman stopped, and Gilbert Ferrers supplied the name.

"Then, Mr. Ferrers, we must meet in the supper-room, as late as possible. Already the company is about leaving the palace."

The consequence of these separate arrange-

ments may be easily foreseen. The Baron sought Gilbert Ferrers at once, and with many apologies pointed out the necessity of a meeting. He was referred to the Marquis of Lowestoft, on whom he impressed the nature of the transaction, and the impossibility of retractation or apology.

"It would never be offered," said the Marquis; "my countryman seems to have only done his duty. It is unfortunate that that duty was imperative." Then they began to arrange the preliminaries, not lightly, but with a heavy sense of responsibility.

The Englishman had the choice of weapons, as being challenged. The Marquis did not inquire into Ferrers' skill with the small sword, but suggested pistols, and carried his point. "The sooner this is over the better."

"Undoubtedly, for we cannot go into barracks with any chance of safety; and as in an hour day will be breaking, the sooner we go towards the forest the better. If it be done at once there will be no chance of interruption, and the place I would suggest is at least an hour's drive from here."

"It was at least another hour before the Marquis had found his coadjutor in the harlequin, and the Baron had got the pistols and the doctor, without whom it was not considered prudent to take the ground. It was felt, indeed, that the combat was to be *à outrance*; and they reached the place I have already indicated with but that short interval for serious reflection.

Prudence had dictated to both parties that they should not return home to dress. The aggrieved De la Fels had no arrangements to make, as he declared; and the sense of injury was too vivid to give him any anxiety as to the speedy termination of the affair. It was a principle of belief with him, shared by all his regiment, and perhaps by all continental regiments, that a blow must be washed out in blood, and the sooner the better.

Not so with Gilbert Ferrers; but he had no means of arresting the speedy consummation of the quarrel. He would willingly have written more than his hour would have given him time to write. He had something which had never weighed with him before, which now rose up in awful solemnity before him. His life had cer-

tainly not been one to which he could look back with much satisfaction. Ties remained to him, long broken, but to which the prospect of possible death seemed to unite him once more. In mid-ocean the shipwrecked sailor thinks more of the shore he has left behind him, than the one he is failing to reach. Mathilde deserved a word of farewell; and comrades in many a trouble in England might have looked for some last token. Of affairs, so called pecuniarily, he had none to settle; but he would have willingly said or written a word to Myra Gray, of whose regrets he would like to have been assured. He already loved her enough to look for the tears she might shed at his untimely end; especially he would have liked to have been assured of them. In affectation of sentiment he was not deficient.

If Gilbert Ferrers had any good quality above another, it was personal courage. He had always prided himself upon it. His life had been one of adventure, which I may hereafter have to recount. His love of life arose from his anticipation of the pleasures he might enjoy in it. At present his prospects were not great, so

that he could part with it, if necessary, with less pain. Possibly he would have hated dying had he been in Lord Lowestoft's position. The uncertain future which troubles most men in such a crisis had fewer fears for him. That he now faced the possibility of death without fear is not to be supposed; but he had no idea of showing the white feather before his fellow-countryman, and with a curious but morbid vanity he was a little comforted by the cause in which he was about to fight: Myra Gray must pity him.

He tore from his pocket-book a page on which he wrote a few lines to Mathilde, and entrusted them to the Marquis to be delivered only in case of his death. Externally his carriage was beyond reproach, or even suspicion.

We need not stop to analyse the feelings of his opponent. He had been bred and brought up in a school where submission to such disgrace was impossible, and he was compelled to accept the alternative as naturally as a duck takes to the water to shield itself from the rain. In his sense of injury he had completely forgotten the wrong which provoked it.

When these men, in their separate *fiacres*,

reached the forest it was too dark to commence operations. They had evaded the police at the barriers under the natural supposition that they were returning to the country from the Grand Duchess's ball, an idea which the retention of their fancy costumes had eminently fostered. The necessity for final arrangements had been postponed till their arrival on the ground.

The question was a simple one, but involving great consequences. Were they to fight after the English fashion, at twelve paces apart, or after a very common continental method *à la barrière* ?

The mode of fighting with pistols *à la barrière* was then resorted to in extreme cases, and the present was thought to be one of those which admitted of very little dispute. Moreover, the Englishman had had the choice of weapons. Could he again demand a choice of the mode of using them? His second stood boldly out, but Gilbert Ferrers himself decided the point by ready acquiescence. It is on this subject that the Guardsman is expostulating when we first discover them :

“Mr. Ferrers, you have aright to object. I

will persist in my objection, for the method proposed is little short of murder."

"I am as willing to fight in that way as any other, my lord ; but as I am in your hands, appeal, if you will, to Prinz Nuremberg."

Prinz Nuremberg was the Marquis's assistant, who figured at this moment as harlequin, and to him the Marquis did appeal.

"I am bound to tell you that should this duel not take place, your principal will be subject not only to gross insult from every German gentleman in Schlagstein ; but it will be almost a duty on the part of Monsieur de la Fels to strike him, or even to draw his sword upon him, wherever he shall meet him. Judge for yourself, therefore, Monsieur le Marquis."

The reasoning was conclusive. The remedy was worse than the disease, and the duel proceeded accordingly.

The Prince and the Comte Degencassel, in their motley, advanced to the middle of the ground. There they drew a line with the sabre of the Rittmeister in the profoundest silence. They then turned back to back, and walked fifteen fair paces from the line in opposite

directions. Then they turn and looked at each other ; and, with a horrible precision and formal salutation, changed ground a pace or two to the left or right, until they appeared to be, each of them, an exact fifteen paces from the line. Here, having cut each a stick from a neighbouring tree they planted it in the ground.

"Gentlemen," said the Prince, in a clear but tremulous tone of voice, "you will place yourselves at the places designated by the sticks at thirty yards apart. You will fire when you please ; you will advance as near as you will to the line drawn by the Rittmeister von Rottenberg's sabre, but not beyond it. Two shots will be allowed to each of you ; and should they prove, as we trust in heaven may be the case, ineffectual, it will be a point of honour that this quarrel proceed no further."

With these words the Prince presented his principal with two pistols, and the Comte Degencassel did the same duty for his friend De la Fels, and the seconds retired to different sides, each on the left hand of his man.

As they took their places in accordance with these directions, it was a terrible spectacle.

Duels of that kind have been fought many times before, but never under an aspect so ghastly. The horrible trappings of earthly merriment covered hearts that might be stripped in another minute of all their tinsel before the eyes of their Maker.





CHAPTER XI.

COMPLETE SATISFACTION FOR THE BARON DE LA FELS.

WHEN Gilbert Ferrers and his antagonist were in position, and the seconds, of whom two were required in a continental passage of arms, the former drew himself up. His personal advantages appeared to their greatest perfection, as he dropped his domino from his shoulders, and exhibited the closely-fitting doublet up to his throat, which was surmounted by a small ruff of handsome lace, and the imitation collar of orders and ornaments which formed a part of the supposed attire of Lord Darnley.

On the signal being given he raised his right hand, holding his pistol, bending the arm in

such a manner as to defend his right side almost entirely from the hip to the shoulder. The other pistol with which he had been provided hung from his left hand listlessly by his side.

He was now thirty paces from the Baron de la Fels ; but he advanced very rapidly towards him, and again stood still about half way between his own station and the barrier beyond which neither were to pass. The Baron had not moved, nor had he yet raised his pistol from his side where he held it firmly at full cock. It seemed as though each waited for the other to fire first. The natural paleness of Gilbert Ferrers was not perceptibly changed ; but the Baron, of a phlegmatic temperament, had now two red spots of unusual brightness upon his cheek bones, and his eyes had something of a trembling light upon them, not frequently seen in eyes so blue.

Gilbert Ferrers looked at his antagonist with great intensity for half a minute. He then moved his arm and readjusted his aim, which had been deranged by his advance. Having done so to his satisfaction, he fired. The smoke

hung in the damp heavy atmosphere, and for a second or two obstructed Gilbert Ferrers' view of his antagonist. When it cleared, the Baron was still in his place ; but he had dropped the pistol from his left hand, which lay still upon the ground.

Gilbert's lips moved with a hurried exclamation, and he threw the pistol from him to some distance. Again there was a pause, and again he covered the Baron de la Fels, who was as motionless as ever.

The seconds had not spoken or moved. All hope of compromise had been set aside before the duel began, and even the English Marquis, by far the least bloodthirsty of the four, felt bound to see it out as far as the two shots went. He was sorry that the one chance of his countryman had failed, and that the odds were now against him. In his ignorance of this form of duel he had expected the German to fire next, and his heart was beating loudly as he waited for the result. Englishmen have been characterised by that coolness which is, after all, only a high quality when accompanied by feeling. Lord Lowestoft, heir to a large

dukedom and allied by blood to the Plantagenets, was not behind his fellows in personal intrepidity. He would have stormed a breach, with a closed lip and unflinching eye, or have stood up himself at half the present distance, with as much *sang froid* as he would have thrown a main or backed a horse for a tolerable stake ; but he did not feel bound to see a fellow-creature shot at with the same peculiarity of nerve—for nerve is of divers kinds. Lord Lowestoft must then stand excused for a passing but unpleasant exhibition of interest. He corrected himself, however, and stood still.

The Baron's seconds might perhaps have expected him to make some demonstration, but as he did not do so, and was evidently not yet *hors de combat*, they showed no signs of weakness. They came there to see an insult washed out, and they were sufficiently well bred to have taken leave of their regrets for the sanguinary work, till it was done.

We said Gilbert Ferrers again covered the Baron with great deliberation ; and so he did. But he again changed his purpose, and thinking the distance too great for a badly-

loaded or defective weapon, for he had no doubt of his own skill, he walked onwards again to within almost arm's length of the fatal barrier. As he stopped the Baron de la Fels raised his arm, doubtless thinking that one shot might be risked at the distance of eighteen paces. If he thought so, he should have been quicker about putting his idea into execution; for he had scarcely got his pistol on a level with his shoulder when the second report from Gilbert Ferrers, followed by a puff of vapour, rang on the ear. The Baron was down, and his pistol had exploded in the air almost before Gilbert Ferrers could see what mischief he had done.

"Low again, Liège!" said Gilbert, examining his weapon without moving. "Curse these Belgian fire-arms! I thought how it would be."

A not less extraordinary exclamation proceeded from the Baron de la Fels, who strove to rise, with the assistance of his seconds.

"Stand back, stand back, Rottenberg! I'm not hurt; only slightly hit;" and as Von Rottenberg and his friend involuntarily loosed their hold at his vehement expostulation, he stood for a few seconds, and then sunk down

upon his knees. "Stand back, I say!" repeated he, as they again took hold of his arm; and seizing the yet undischarged pistol, which lay near him, he began to crawl on all fours towards Gilbert Ferrers.

Lord Lowestoft, with an unmistakable apprehension of what was about to ensue, stepped forward for the purpose of intervention. Speaking rapidly in French, the language in which the whole affair had been conducted, Lord Lowestoft approached the wounded man and his seconds.

"But, gentlemen, this is murder. I shall remove my man from the ground; you cannot do this." A placid smile appeared to light up Von Rottenberg's face, as he made answer—

"Excuse me, he is in his right, if he wishes to push it so far." Then turning, he spoke rapidly in his own language to the Baron de la Fels, who was truly a terrible object to behold. His face was now almost the colour of death; and the moustachios, peculiarly turned up, and the painted eyebrows, and the fading light in the eyes, gave him a ghastly appearance almost indescribable. He was with difficulty dragging

himself along the ground, with the pistol pointed towards Gilbert Ferrers, who was standing in his former place, still examining, or pretending to examine, his useless pistol.

As Von Rottenberg spoke De la Fels was arrested in his course. His reply gave the Englishman the cue to what had been said.

"Spare him! spare him!" gasped the wounded tiger; "you say 'spare him,' indeed! You have not two pistol shots on your body." Saying which he exhibited his left arm, which had been struck above the wrist by Gilbert Ferrers' first fire.

"What, will he shoot him; shoot him from the barrier, like a dog!" said the Marquis. "Never, never, it is absurd—it is simple murder! I shall take away my man." And Lord Lowestoft was turning to do so.

"You cannot, you cannot indeed. It is running away after having shot his antagonist twice—impossible, monsieur—out of the question, milord; ask the Prince." And the Prince was referred to, and gave it against his friend.

"Lowestoft, my friend, it must be." Upon which De la Fels began again to crawl onward,

and Lord Lowestoft turned his back upon the scene, and put his hands, with a shudder, over his face.

From that moment there was no interruption to his onward course. When the seconds of both knew the inevitable result, and the pitiless necessity for non-interposition, their humanity began to revolt; their assumed indifference asserted its falsehood; their bravado turned to a shuddering sickness; and instead of standing apart they broke through their punctilio, and sidled nearer to one another. A sort of fatal fascination kept their eyes fixed upon the scene, with the exception of Lord Lowestoft, who thought it no dishonour to turn his back upon an affair in which nothing but butchery could be served. "Affair of honour," thought he to himself, "honour indeed! but what am I to do? It is true Ferrers has shot him, and we should have counted the cost before we gave way to this exceptional code of honourable murder!" Still while he thought, De la Fels diminished the distance between them; and he was now within two or three feet of the barrier. He was gasping for breath, faint dews of death

were stealing over his face, a film was even now over his glassy eyes, which had never left the face of Gilbert Ferrers, and his features were drawn convulsively with pain.

Up to this moment Ferrers had commanded himself beyond all expectation. He uttered no words, no curse, no expostulation by sign. Now, for a minute, he placed his hand before his face as if to shut out a hideous dream ; but he was unable or unwilling to keep it there. Suddenly his purpose changed ; as the last moment seemed at hand he would not die without some resistance. His nerves had been strung by the suspense to a tension worse than that of a malefactor on the drop, and a sudden resolve changed his face from its ashen composure to vindictive or desperate defence. He suddenly shifted the pistol in his hand ; and, clutching the barrel, raised it above his head, with the determination of hurling it into the face of his opponent. But he was saved this unfair and therefore dishonourable advantage. As the Baron reached the barrier, and, clutching a long tuft of grass to draw himself nearer his victim, pointed his pistol straight at Ferrers' breast, the hand, on

which he supported himself thus feebly, relaxed so unexpectedly, that he fell flat upon his face in the dank grass, and the pistol went off harmlessly from the ground.

At the explosion Lord Lowestoft turned round, expecting to see Gilbert Ferrers in the agonies of death, or lifeless upon the ground. The case, however, was sufficiently explained, and he saw that his own expostulation and the time gained by that interference had probably saved the life of his fellow-countryman. Enough that it was so. The heavier weight was lifted from his conscience, and so insupportable had it been, that he scarcely recognised the fact that he had been, at all events, assisting at a homicide which custom alone called justifiable, and which would be punished even by the laws of man.

From out one of the *fiacres*, whence he had been watching the proceedings as well as the place and light allowed him, came the regimental doctor. To do him justice, he lost no time in lifting up the wounded man. He paused to make no inquiries, but proceeded at once to ascertain the presence or absence of vitality. A few seconds' examination showed

him that De la Fels was still alive; a few seconds more enabled him to explain that he had fainted from loss of blood and bodily pain, and that his wounds, the one in the side the other in the arm, were severe indeed, and perhaps dangerous, but not absolutely fatal. It was something of a relief to them all, as they clustered round the senseless body and the doctor, without any hope of being able to render him assistance.

Ferrers had never moved excepting to let fall the pistol, which was now no longer of use to him. The doctor looked up at him, and regarded him doubtless as a curiosity among human and intelligent machines. At length he spoke.

“Monsieur, I congratulate you on your escape. You have never been so near death before. One or two seconds more, and I must, I fear, have had the pain of attending you with far less chance of a successful issue. But you had better go at once. Take the other *fiacre*, your English friend can escort you immediately beyond the frontier; unless you wish to live for the next three or four years in a German

fortress. You shall have news of Monsieur de la Fels, but the sooner you are in England the better. Monsieur le Marquis, j'ai l'honneur de vous saluer."

The Marquis gave the doctor an address to which he might write, and, passing his arm through that of Gilbert Ferrers, he disappeared in search of the vacant *fiacre*. The Prince assisted his compatriots to carry the Baron to the carriage, where we leave him for the present to the tender solicitude of the regimental surgeon and his late seconds.

We need not stop to analyse the feelings of Gilbert Ferrers on the narrow escape he had had ; nor need we wonder that the greater part of the journey was passed in silence. It was some time before either he or his companion could get over the mixed feelings which agitated them. Gilbert Ferrers was the less oppressed by them of the two ; but even he was not wholly himself when they crossed the frontier, and found themselves free from the fear of arrest for the present. A few days reassured them, for they got satisfactory accounts of De la Fels, and within a fortnight

the doctors pronounced him out of danger, though his recovery was likely to be slow.

Lord Lowestoft stayed no longer with Ferrers than was necessary. A very short knowledge of that gentleman proved to his lordship that a longer acquaintance or closer intimacy was not likely to be beneficial to him. He was not averse to social good qualities in his equals, and would have made no wry faces at proposals for gambling, or any other way of passing time in a continental town, from a well-educated gentleman. But he soon discovered the cloven hoof in Gilbert Ferrers ; and was content to pay the penalty of some clever billiard sharpening, and a very handsome sum in napoleons and rix-thalers for the pleasure of freeing himself from the mysterious stranger, whom the accidental circumstance of a duel had forced upon him for the time. Perhaps they were, like the cabman's shilling, as broad as they were long ; for Gilbert Ferrers was hard up, and would have borrowed freely from the young nobleman, without much idea of repaying such a loan, unless circumstances compelled him to do so.

"Then you're off to-morrow, my lord, back again to Schlagstein?"

"I propose returning there immediately," replied he, thinking it would be no very probable place for Gilbert Ferrers to accompany him to.

Gilbert, however, weighed the chances in his own mind for a minute or two, for big fish were not caught every day, and then said, "I've a great mind to go back too. This cursed affair has driven me out of Schlagstein before I intended to go. I fancy it's all blown over by this time."

"I should advise you to go to England, or at least anywhere but there. Shooting one of the officers of the only cavalry corps in the Duchy is more than a nine days' wonder."

"Well, perhaps you're right; but—you see, the—the fact is, I want to get back to see if any remittances——"

"Oh! if that's all, I've sufficient to supply your deficiency as far as England. That can easily be settled afterwards. Send me out a circular note, or pay it into Herries and Farquhar's for me;" and suiting the action to the word, he drew

out his pocket-book, and produced a thousand franc billet. "There, Mr. Ferrers, give me back the twenty-five napoleons I gave you yesterday, and the billet will be as much probably as you will want before reaching England."

It was evident to the meanest capacity that Lord Lowestoft did not intend to reappear anywhere with the handsome mystery, who had broken a bank and shot two German gentlemen in a short six weeks, attached to him. Gilbert himself saw that it was useless, and thought the price paid was fair enough for the accommodation of his absence, some forty pounds, besides waifs and strays. He returned to the hotel at the retired spa in the Black Forest at which they had been sojourning; and when Lord Lowestoft had departed in the morning for Schlagstein, Gilbert Ferrers called for his bill, and started for London on the same afternoon.

Schlagstein was not in itself a gay place, excepting upon occasion. A Grand Duke's birthday produced dinners *al fresco*, and tremendous fireworks and illuminations, a free entrance to the casinos, which was a boon of about threepence a head to the public, and

much instrumental music and love-making of a mild sort. A duel after a masked ball was therefore a godsend to the curious and the scandal-mongers. A duel, too, of such a fanciful, imaginative kind ; in which a noble Englishman, a real milord, a Prince of the Palatinate, and four blue and silver officers took part, one of whom was nearly killed. When would Schlagsteiners forget the benefactors who flavoured their five o'clock tea, and buttered their *dampfknöden* with such highly-spiced condiments. Of course it became the topic of the day. The Grand Duke swore a mighty German oath, and the Grand Duchess, for the first time in her life, scolded Madame de Horsemann, because the Marquis had been driven from the Court by it.

When Mathilde appeared at breakfast on the morning following she knew nothing about it ; but she did remark that Myra's eyes were not the better for late or early hours.

"Don't talk of it, Mathilde, but tell me what I'm to do ; and how shall we ever hear about it." And Myra wrung her hands, not gracefully, as is the manner of some, but with much

unaffected woe ; and then she told her friend and *confidante* the story, as we have told it to you.

“Wasn’t it generous, Mathilde ! So kind, so noble, and, oh ! so handsome. And now perhaps he is——” weltering in his blood, she meant to say ; but she it took too seriously to heart to be poetical.

It is but right to say that with all their curiosity, they made no way towards the creeping and crawling mystery, which was well-preserved, and might have remained so but for me. All that transpired was this :—that a duel had been fought between the Baron de la Fels and an Englishman, in consequence of a blow struck by the latter ; that the Baron had been hit twice, and was dangerously wounded ; and that the Englishman had escaped, and got safely to England.

Two persons only seemed much aggrieved by his precipitate retreat. Myra Gray had reason to repine that she was separated from a declared lover ; and the landlady of the rooms, which Gilbert Ferrers chose to occupy in preference to an hotel, regretted an unsettled account. It suited

Gilbert, however, to satisfy the doubts of both of these by writing from England to the one, and by sending a cheque to the other, as soon as he reached London. In both cases it was an unusual stretch of honesty, which his personal interests suggested. Myra he certainly had no intention of resigning after his risks and trouble, and the prospective advantages of a second visit to Schlagstein made him propitiate an old woman who might be useful to him.

It is not an uncommon thing to fight with your wife or your family for a mastery or advantage, and, after making yourself and all about you miserable and irritable for a fortnight, to give up your point as soon as you have gained it; a concession based on some views of generosity. I can only say that this is not a view of generosity taken by Gilbert Ferrers.

From that day he laid siege to Myra Gray through a channel which he knew would serve his purpose, and one which he worked ruthlessly and cruelly. He wrote to Mathilde throughout the winter and spring of the following year in language conveying unmistakable declarations of fervent love, and holding out

subtle promises of care and protection of that dreamy mysterious kind which amused while they did not deceive her. But he made no secret of his wish to possess the fortune of Myra Gray by one means or another, nor of his ungenerous desire that she should assist him in his object. Nay, he made it apparent to her that his love would increase or wane in proportion to her obedience to his directions and her own capability for aiding his nefarious measures.

Neither, as I have said, would Mathilde have cared to be undeceived. She was walking with her eyes open to the grave she had dug for herself. She sacrificed Myra Gray to the avarice of her own lover, and was able to write from week to week of the progress of a passion which had been begun under her auspices, and which was progressing favourably to its results. Mathilde was satisfied with knowing or thinking that Gilbert Ferrers loved her. He was perfectly welcome to marry any woman who could add to his creature comforts without causing her any jealousy by mutual attachment. She believed this of Myra.

The fact was, however, doubtful which of the two women Ferrers loved most or least. He took life as he found it; an oyster for him to open—in the fullest sense of the word—and the shells for any one who liked them. He pretended to love Mathilde, for she was his channel, a stepping-stone to the affections of Myra Gray. He pretended to love Myra Gray, for it was only by an honourable proposal that he could hope to share—no, not to share, to spoil—her fortune and the prestige of her connection. Marriage was desirable with the latter; with the former it was worse than useless. So the time passed on with Lord Fitzcourthope's ward, and she was reaping the benefit of an early continental education, acquiring a tone, and an accent, and other foreign virtues which are so well worth the acquisition. She had better have been in Ireland, riding wild horses with wild young gentlemen from the barracks, than have retired to the conventional propriety of being fondled by such a viper as Mathilde.



CHAPTER XII.

LORD FITZCOURTHOPE AT MELTON MOWBRAY.

SPRING, summer, and autumn having been gone through, we turn to a change of scene as complete as can well be imagined. We are again in England, and the time is the middle of winter. Lord Fitzcourt-hope and his daughters had done their duty in London, while Myra Gray was enjoying the advantages of a summer in Schlagstein. Her absence had caused them no particular uneasiness ; and though the peer occasionally thought of her bright face and loving ways, what with his politics, and his club dinners, his trip to Scotland, and his son's debts, an investment in racehorses, and a collection of a moderate stud for Melton, above all, from his Irish nature, it

was clear to Myra herself that she was indispensable to nobody of her guardian's household.

Melton was quite full. The season had been very open ; and a growing taste for fox-hunting, with a great ignorance of its difficulties, was beginning to make it a less *recherché* enjoyment than formerly. Among the finest horsemen in Ireland, and consequently in the world, Fitzcourthope was pre-eminent. Though he was known to be poor, Melton would not have been itself without his long, loose seat and brilliant horsemanship for some time of the season ; and he never lacked an invitation from some of his friends or acquaintances, so long as he could mount himself for a month or two. Mounting their noble Earl was no joke, for he very properly considered that the first object was to be in the same field as the hounds from beginning to end, and he never regarded a horse good, bad, or indifferent, but as a means to that end.

No sooner, therefore, had he returned from Scotland, and before the Ladies Honoria and Catherine had had time to think of Ireland, Lord Fitzcourthope had arranged to go to Leicestershire.

"Honoriamy dear, I think we must give up Ireland until after Christmas. It's a very expensive journey, and Lord Thistledown has offered me accommodation in the Grange for a week or two."

The Lady Honoriam had had experience of the Earl's notions of a week or two; and on these occasions frequently found herself without money to pay the weekly bills, while her father was forgetting everything and body but himself, in the Vale of Beauvoir or in the Thrusington lordship; so she replied—

"Expensive, papa? more expensive than Mr. Anderson's yard or Tattersall's?"

"Well! we always get something back from that; but there's no money returned out of the Irish journey."

She knew how very small the returns were out of the other, so she maintained an obstinate silence.

Presently the Earl began again. "You've not heard lately from Germany?"

"G—Germany? Oh! I forgot. No; not very lately."

"I suppose we're not to expect Myra this winter?"

"I should think not. She seems very happy with your old friend the Countess de Horsemann, and is constantly at the Palace. Mrs. Montessor's accounts are very good"—("And not very heavy," said his lordship, parenthetically)—"and it really would be much better to let her remain, particularly as we have no room here for her, and you mean to go to Melton for a week or two. You're sure to finish the season."

"No, no, my dear Honoria; no man ever gave way to his children as I do; but if I can get together a small stud, say half a dozen good horses, at a moderate price, I'll be your pioneer. I'll go to Thistledown's and look for a small place, or a lodging for us all, in or near Melton. You can bring down your chestnut mare, and I'll give Catherine a mount on some of mine, when I know what they are."

And in that manner it was arranged. Lord Fitzcourthope went down after buying some horses, which was partly a ready-money transaction only, and when he had been there a month he found a small place some little distance from Melton, where he received his

daughters, and to which he gave Lord Courthope a friendly invitation, which that young gentleman did not see fit to accept.

“There never was a better fellow than my father,” said he, in commenting on this unexpected proffer of hospitality; “but I can’t endure half-made hunters over such a country as the Vale, and no man gives his best claret to people who take such unconscionable credit as the governor.”

However, they got on pretty well without him, for there was a hospitable set down there; and what with three days at one house and three at another from time to time, and an occasional run up to town, a little dinner here and a county ball there, the ladies were kept from open rebellion or much subdued grumbling. As to Lord Fitzcourthope himself no life suited him so well. He was thoroughly enjoying himself, declared every horse he had to be the best in England if you could but ride him, and put aside for the time every recollection of the duns, debts, and difficulties which surrounded Castle Courthope. What is one man’s meat is another man’s poison; and his account of the stud was

not far from the truth. One horse was very good when you were once on his back, and he was off; but it took three grooms, besides his accomplished master, to reach that desirable point. Another could go over any country if you could but hold him, and was better through dirt than anywhere; but, as the second horseman averred, it should have been all through dirt from beginning to end to make him any way pleasant. A third required to be sat down upon for the first half-hour, and if you were not kicked off by that time, a child might have ridden him; while an entire horse, called the "Man-eater," was not given to falling, but had once knelt upon the unfortunate man who fell with him, and half-eaten him before he could be got from under him. Some were bad in the stable; some would not let you get on again when you were once off; some did one thing, some another, but all came under the denomination of "playful," and were undeniably good hunters when the right man was in the right place.

Lord Fitzcourthope's daughters felt a lady-like indifference to the fate of Myra Gray,

and, excepting upon certain occasions, almost ignored her existence. The girl herself had made friends in Ireland, but not being known in England, it was only very rarely that she was inquired after at all. There was, to be sure, a kind-hearted, troublesome old woman, a Lady Rooksborough, who was staying with her son in the six-hill country, who would recollect some little kindnesses of Myra's, and would always be asking questions difficult to answer satisfactorily. But Lady Honoria was not to be disturbed by any old lady so much as by the perplexing thought of what she was to have done with a rough Irish girl, decidedly pretty—almost beautiful—before either she or Lady Catherine had found eligible *partis* for themselves. The repugnance was not to the girl, but to the position in which she placed them, and was natural enough. We may all hate the sin, while we love—though it does depend upon the sex and circumstances—the sinner.

“Well, Lady Honoria, how is my little friend that used to sort my wools, and bring my footstool, and thread my needle for me when I was in Ireland the year before last?”

Lady Rooksborough was hook-nosed, bright-eyed, beetle-browed, seventy-two, and, of course, strong-minded; all such women—peeresses I mean—are. She had had her own way for nearly sixty years, and said what she liked, she was not likely to give up her privileges now.

“You mean Myra Gray, Lady Rooksborough. She’s not in England.”

“Of course; who else should I mean? You’ve left her behind you, then, at Castle Courthope?” By the look of the old lady she had possibly heard all about Myra Gray and the family arrangements.

“Myra is abroad, *en pension*, at Schlagstein.” Lady Honoria thought that was sufficient, and tried to turn the conversation.

“Alone? Impossible!”

“She is *en pension*; and a friend of papa’s looks after and gives her as much of her time as she can. She is a lady-in-waiting on the Grand Duchess, and Myra is constantly at the Palace.”

“Whose dulness, my dear, is relieved by fortune-hunters and sharpers. The Duke is a good man and profoundly stupid, the Duchess is

a better woman, and even more stupid than the Duke ; the whole Court is made up of petty scandals, and intrigues, and ceremonies, and bowings and scrapings. There's not a place worth living in on the whole of the Continent but Paris or Vienna. As to your pretty friend Myra, and Schlagstein, I hope she'll come successfully out of it. If she does, send her to me, Lady Honoria. I've nothing to do, and I should like to bring her out amazingly."

"Impudent old woman!" thought Lady Honoria, while she answered, "We expect her home next winter, and then she can be presented in the spring. I'm sure papa would be most grateful to you for your offer," and Lady Honoria wondered how far it might answer their purpose, only wishing it had come in a more gracious way. She was checked in a rather collected answer by the recollection that Lord Rooksborough was still unmarried, and the Lady Catherine's chance ought not to be jeopardised for the gratification of her own temper or her wit. Would that all litigants were equally considerate.

We were in the early days of railways (they

now went as far as Leicester towards Melton), and everybody had been up to the pantomimes or to have their hair cut during the frost. If frost served no other purpose, it would enable your true British sportsman to enlarge his mind, to see men and cities, and to occupy himself with other pursuits than that of the fox, and those which demand open weather. Lord Fitzcourthope went up alone, leaving the Ladies Honoria and Catherine to keep house (pig-stye they called it) and one another company. That it was a little dull there is no denying; and a box in a fashionable part of Leicestershire is not as large as an Irish castle; but it is not so tumble-down as many of them; and as to the stables—"Och, wouldn't I be glad to live in 'em!"

Lord Fitzcourthope could no more go to London—to his club, to a theatre, or anywhere else—without meeting a friend than you could go to Constantinople without meeting a minaret, or to Cashmere, by way of Moore's poetry, without meeting a *gulgul*, whatever that may be. And the meeting with a friend was equivalent to asking him down to share his hospitality; not, indeed, magnifying the accommodation, but

speaking of it at all times as a thing that would stretch, that would give nobody inconvenience, and that was as much a home and roadside public under private management as Castle Courthope itself. It was well that he asked nobody else than the one man he brought back with him, for they most assuredly would have come. So cheerful a companion, *un si bon vivant*, so good a sportsman, and two such popular girls as the Ladies Honoria and Catherine were not likely to be without visitors as long as a bedroom in the house remained unoccupied. You see, every Englishman's "house is his castle," and every Irishman seems to think that he has brought his castle with him to England.

It so happened at this time that Henry Deloraine had just finished his season in Ireland, and was come to town because he had lamed his horses, and wished to escape the importunity of some of his tenants, who, having paid nothing for some years, were now about to claim a remission of two-thirds of their supposed rental on some grounds, to which his agent suggested absence as the best answer.

Parliament had met some little time, and the long frost had just broken, when Lord Fitzcourthope found him grumbling at his ill luck in having finished the season a month before its proper time.

Now Fitzcourthope was essentially a young man's companion. He liked youth, for it preserved his persuasion of his own unflagging powers. His habits were young, and his inclinations juvenile, even where his convictions were elderly. And of all the young men of his acquaintance, he especially liked Henry Deloraine. He and his father had been friends: he had been trustee to some of his property before he came of age, and as Deloraine was a trifle old for his years, he met the Earl halfway. He liked him, too, better than any of Courthope's friends; for though Henry Deloraine had been said to be a man of pleasure, he was not a gambler or a turfite, to both of which pursuits Lord Courthope did too seriously incline. To be sure Lord Fitzcourthope himself had been seriously addicted to both pleasures in his youth, and at this very time had a horse which was very leniently handicapped for the Cam-

bridgeshire, and it was supposed that no one knew that fact better than himself and his trainer. Be that as it may, if he chose the bitter for himself, he knew the sweet; and he had a natural objection to supply the extravagances of his son, so long as his own capacity for expenditure far exceeded the resources of the estate. When two men have to ride on one horse, of course the absolute owner ought to ride in front.

He knew well that Henry Deloraine had considerable influence with Lord Courthope, and that that influence was generally used for the family advantage; that he kept him out of scrapes sometimes, and helped him out of them at others. For these little mercies he was grateful enough, if for no others; and Deloraine stood high in his estimation.

But, besides all this, Deloraine had seen more of the world than most of his acquaintances of the same age. He was an agreeable companion, with just enough of wit not to interrupt cheerful conversation, and humour enough to adorn it when it became too severe—seldom enough, it must be admitted, in the society they frequented.

He had, also, much tact, and kept pace with the Earl in his refined and classical allusions, of which the old peer was proud; and Deloraine, though not a rich man, had a fair estate, an old family name, good connections, and would have been a sufficient match for Lady Catherine, if he had but a fancy for matrimony. Lord Fitzcourthope had been married young himself, as most impoverished Irishmen are, with the hope of sowing their wild oats and reaping a crop of garden flowers. It does not always answer, nor did it in his case; but he saw no reason why Deloraine should not pursue so laudable a course without the same urgent motives as his own. These were some of the reasons why he liked him, and they were better than most that can be given for such friendships. So it happened that Deloraine came down to finish the season with two or three horses as the guest of Lord Fitzcourthope. He rode to the meets with the ladies as opportunity offered, and was extremely attentive, so much so, as to take some of the trouble off his entertainer's shoulders; and when both ladies hunted together, which was a condition dependent on the state of the stud, the

most censorious could not have found a fault or harboured a suspicion. If the Ladies Courthope themselves were at fault, they were undeceived before the termination of the visit.

Deloraine, however, enjoyed himself exceedingly; he rode hard and well, saw his friends a little before his London season, which usually began with the Derby, and found the claret very much to his liking, notwithstanding Courthope's sneer and libel on the liberality of the old-fashioned wine merchants, who have set themselves in noble opposition to the new-made companies, and give handsome credit and dinners if they give nothing else. He was so little a frequenter of Melton, or, indeed, of any country but his own—a moderately good one in the west of Ireland—that he was charmed with the grass and the galloping. He very soon got into the way of giving up the hunted fox after a sharp burst, when the hunting became a little cold, and trotting off to draw some John o' Gaunt's or favourite gorse, which was sure to hold a flyer; though he had been bred up in the orthodox rule that the main object of hunting the fox is to kill him, and that a rattling scurry

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of fifteen or twenty minutes is only his condemnation. After that comes the execution, a business requiring patience and time and talent for its fulfilment. After a fast twenty minutes from the find no fox ought to escape, if the field behave with decency and the hounds are handled by a workman, unless unavoidable accidents intervene. And so much for hunting.

Many men like to talk about a woman they half love ; indeed, all men do. Your truly deep-seated passion broods solemnly and secretly over its own sorrow—for there's a great comfort in a sorrow of this kind ; and if it does not come naturally we are sure to make it for ourselves. What is called a grand passion does not elevate, excepting in certain minds, it rather darkens and deepens character, but makes the possessor silent, selfish, misanthropic. But a half-developed passion, a light, uncertain love that you can just blush about, and nothing more, is a totally different thing. A love in its early stages may be talked about, and gives pleasure in its mention rather than pain ; and then it develops itself into a wholesome sort of affection, good for the object of it, containing a sufficiency

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of sentiment for genteel comedy, which is supposed to represent real life. In some hands it does, in some it does not. Men are much the better for such an amount of love as this. It cannot be said to elevate, but it enlivens, purifies, cleanses, and renders us far less selfish and churlish than by nature the bachelor is.

It was just such a sentiment as this which animated Deloraine, but it was not for Lady Catherine Courthope, and that young lady was sharp enough very soon to find it out. That discovery did not act beneficially upon her, or she would have done, as she might, something to forward his views.

And who should the lady be but Myra Gray! Since Henry Deloraine had been two or three and twenty and Myra fourteen, he had been a sort of fatherly admirer of the girl; he admired her grace, her freedom, her riding, her freshness, and her truth, that utter absence from conventionalism which was not by any means a characteristic of Castle Courthope. And now when he was six or seven and twenty, and Myra eighteen, he felt the same delicate appreciation of her appearance and qualities as before,

heightened by the fact of increased age on both sides.

"I haven't heard you speak of my old friend Myra Gray yet, Lady Honoria; I hope the accounts from Germany are good." They were riding to the meet, and in front of them was Lord Fitzcourthope with Lady Catherine.

"Thanks, I'm sure Myra would be flattered if she thought you recollected her at all. Yes! the accounts are very good, when we hear."

"Not a good correspondent? That's not like her," rejoined Deloraine. The fact is that Myra Gray was a very good correspondent, and Lady Honoria a very bad one; besides which she could not regard Myra as out of the atmosphere of the schoolroom or nursery.

"Oh! one forgives anything in a girl of Myra's age; I dare say she finds something new to occupy herself with in Schlagstein. They're rather gay at the Palace, and an old friend of papa's is very kind in receiving her. We hoped great things for her by next season, but Myra was always a little self-willed, and I suppose she likes pleasure better than improving her mind."

Deloraine was the sort of person that women held in estimation as being a pattern man in the way of education and cultivation of intellect. If there was anything in the world that he hated it was a woman—a young one—that was fond of improving her mind, and he said so. So Lady Honoria saw she was wrong, and wisely let the subject drop.

“Don’t you think Catherine sits a very little over on her horse?” presently she resumed. Now Catherine Courthope had a remarkably straight seat, and Lady Honoria knew it, and she admired it as much as others did, so she ought to have said so; but as she was conscious of baiting a trap, she did not. Conscience makes cowards of us all. Deloraine spoke his mind freely; he knew no better horsewoman than Lady Catherine.

“She sits as straight as a die,” said he. “I know some of our acquaintance who ride harder, and whose semi-professional appearance in the saddle is a caution to hard-riding squires, but I know no one to be compared with her as a horsewoman. Her seat is perfection, and her hands seem as good as can be.”

This was all Lady Honoria wanted, for if she was possessed of one really unselfish feeling (and she was of many), it was an equal wish to marry Catherine or herself. A sort of indiscriminating feeling that a good match was due to the family, and her father's crippled condition, without prejudice to the claims of either.

So they rode on in silence, trotting along the grass, which in the Midland Counties so often borders the broad turnpike-roads, as well as by-lanes. Occasionally they turned through the bridle-gates to canter over two or three fields, making a short and luxurious cut, pleasures and privileges unknown in those miserable counties where all soul for fox-hunting sleeps or is dead, and where every man locks up his gate and wards off his trumpery bit of property with bolts and bars and iron fencing. Then as they came together, the real beauty of Lady Catherine's lithe and elegant figure, its play above the waist, and the careless but graceful fall of her shoulders, as she played with her horse's mouth, showed in charming contrast with the exceedingly angular and manly, though no less masterly, exhibition of an amazon who

galloped past them, accompanied by a well-turned-out groom with a small battleaxe for the destruction of unladylike obstacles in the course of her break-neck performance.

“By the way, Lady Catherine, is it this season or next that you are expecting Myra Gray back to England?” said Henry Deloraine to the other sister, confident that the subject must be as acceptable to others of his friends as to himself.

“Myra Gray, is it?” inquired Lady Catherine, who not only was Irish to the back-bone, but was fond of affecting it. “Indeed, Mr. Deloraine, now I remember, you were always a great admirer of Myra’s hair, was it, or her eyes?—Ah, her eyes! Well, they’re very handsome——”

“No, Lady Catherine, not her eyes, not her hair; I like Myra Gray altogether. It’s her disposition, and a general sort of liking I have for her. I don’t think I quite know the colour of her eyes or her hair;” in saying which Deloraine spoke the truth. He felt just what he said, that general, light-hearted, unselfish liking for Myra, which might ripen into real

affection if it received encouragement, or fell in with opportunity.

"To be sure Myra was a good little girl when ye knew her at Castle Courthope, and when she comes home she'll be a woman; I don't think it'll be this season, for there's not room in the house to hold us all."

"Castle Courthope's as big as Belvoir," replied Deloraine, thinking of the vale and the run he had had in it the day before yesterday.

"Castle Courthope! It's not Ireland that will satisfy Myra when she returns. It's nothing less than a queen's ball——"

"Or a run with the hounds, or a day's trout-fishing, or anything else of the sort. Myra Gray is a fine girl, and would make a good honest fellow happy, Lady Catherine, or I'm much mistaken."

"You're becoming enthusiastic, Mr. Deloraine. But there, look at the hounds, on in front, coming through the gate at the bottom of the hill. Let's trot on; I like to see the beauties now, for papa doesn't approve of our going off the road or out of the lanes when the hounds have once found." And as she spoke she broke

into a canter which brought them up to the hounds in a few minutes, and gave them time for that very sportsmanlike inspection, which now seems to take rank after your own leathers and tops, your own horse, and the general appearance and condition of your friends and their horses.

If this book ever falls into the hands of a young sportsman, or pretender, recollect that the way to the master's heart is through his hounds. If you have a moment to spare from yourself and your empty-headed friend, bestow it upon the pack, and if you feel no enthusiasm—
affect it.

Many such conversations took place between the ladies and Deloraine.





CHAPTER XIII.

A RUN IN THE SHIRES.

IT was a nice morning (for every thing but hunting, the clever contributors and special correspondents would have said) about the middle of March, with a hot sun and a clear sky. There was not much wind to speak of, and what there was was undoubtedly east. There might have been a *soupsçon* of south in it. The fields were dry as bones, and the dust occasionally lifted itself, about the height of the hedges, as the quick mail-phaeton or a lady's pony-carriage rattled along the road. There was more of it as Nimble Chouser, of Turnover, Burney, and Co.'s gigantic discount house, swept by in his waggonette, full of young bankers and East-end swells, each exhibiting a

collar of pink from his *malè-pertinax* pea-jacket, and decorated by the ladies of the house with an offering from the conservatory.

It was at least an hour later than usual, for the hunt ball had taken place the night before in an obscure little town, remarkable only for its extreme quietude, and its excellent stabling. It possessed the very darkest and dingiest ball-room in the middle of England, where once a year there came together the most aristocratic assembly that could well be met with out of Belgravia. Nothing more vulgar than a country squire or a parson was admissible, and at least two-thirds of the *danseurs* and *danseuses* were sons and daughters of a titled aristocracy. Exceptions of late years had been made in favour of hard-riding Manchester and Leamington men, when they had become *habitués* of the shires, or who guaranteed not to have less than a million; but, even then, it required some interest and considerable effort on their own part to secure one dance with anything beyond a parson's fresh daughter or a rather washed-out country beauty of thirty.

A certain regiment (which shared the melan-

choly prejudice, with many others, that men of certain professions, the army especially, can go anywhere; that their coats made them gentlemen; that to serve her Majesty, or to have fought, with or without bleeding, was a sort of passport to society all over the world; and that their presence in such a benighted desert as Market Steepletown would be acknowledged as a distinguished mark of their condescension) arrived some years ago at one of these very pleasant, but somewhat peculiar, re-unions. If they had not bled before, they did then. They came some twenty miles in the good old posting days, with some carriages and four, and paid as usual a guinea each for his ticket. The journey had the advantage of including some tough fowls, raw tongue, and a glass or two of most superior South African sherry, under the name of supper. They came, too, in full form, regimentals *de rigueur*, headed by their colonel, a most excellent man, to whom the late D—— of —— had given a commission in compensation for many suits of clothes unpaid for and owing to the colonel's worthy father. They were determined that there should be no mistake

about the service to which they belonged. Arriving in a body, they made, I am told, a distinguished appearance on entering. As nobody of any note ever came before eleven o'clock, and the majority about midnight, they had plenty of room for the display, and attributed their isolation to the emptiness of the room.

At length it began to fill. A few dukes, several marquises and earls, with Ladies Anne, Edith, Constance, Eveleen, Cecilia, Augusta, Jessie, Violet, and Kathleen, an enormous mass of Lords Charles, Ernest, Henry, Frederick, George, no end of the inferior nobility, viscounts and barons, baronets, masters of hounds, and a squirearchy from the Conqueror backwards, with names of three syllables at least, came together about midnight to sup and separate at two in the morning: They danced furiously, talked turnpikes, parish schools, fox-hunting, and the next election; looked in at the supper, but didn't partake of it; and were enjoying themselves almost unconscious that her Majesty's One Hundred and Forty-first Flatcatchers were present. One or two of the Household Brigade had looked with wondering

eyes at their fine clothes; and a very hard-riding cornet, who was staying in a neighbouring castle, mistook them for the band, to whom he afterwards apologised. They would have escaped further notice but for an unexpected move on their part. Seeing a quiet, sleepy-looking man, of peculiarly distinguished personal appearance, decorated with a steward's rosette, and in a red coat, like himself, but not of the same cut, lounging against one of the pillars of the room, a little Irish major (I have heard somewhere that all Irishmen are majors) addressed him with studied politeness, which nearly boiled over in his face.

"Perhaps, sir-r-r, as ye appear to be one of 'em, ye'll tell me the duty of a steward of a county ball, sir-r-r?"

Sir Everard Compton turned slowly round, and looking at the speaker with a mixture of good-humour and curiosity, said, "The duty of the stewards is to pay for the music, and make good any other deficiencies there may be. I hope you are not one of them."

In another moment a heavy tramp as of warriors might have been heard; but every one

was too much engaged to listen to it. The colonel headed his officers, and two by two they walked as composedly out of the room as the crowd and the dancing would permit. They consoled themselves with the notion that they had given a lesson in good manners to a set of uncivilised rustics, who lived in the country for the barbarous purpose of destroying the foxes ; but they would scarcely have been much gratified had they known that their exit was not made the subject of a single remark, excepting by the light cavalry cornet, who, having assured himself that they were soldiers, pitied the hardship of their sudden retirement under the supposition of "early dwill." "Stable duty," said he, "is a bore ; but we're not obliged to be ready before six, and then it's only one of us, you know ;" and Market Steepletown remains just as bad as ever.

It was after one of these meetings that the hounds were late ; for a magnate proposed (a very rare thing in the shires) to give a large breakfast, and begged for a lawn meet and more time. The latter was granted, and it was twelve o'clock in the day, or nearly so, when a

magnificent cavalcade wound itself slowly down the slope of a hill in the neighbourhood of the park towards the cover at the bottom. We have described the morning. The outer park, for it was of enormous extent, embraced almost every variety of sylvan beauty. The ground was broken almost like the lower slopes of the Tyrolese hills. Boulders of considerable size dotted it here and there. The most picturesquely rugged trees, whose long branching arms and stunted boles told of their age, stood out in bold relief against the clear sky, and under several of them, by the side of a picturesque river, were magnificent red-deer, who rose and stretched themselves at the strange intrusion. These were divided from the field and the hounds by a noble stream, which ran leaping and flashing in the bright sharp sunshine through the park, and lost itself under the cover the hounds were about to draw.

"There'll be no scent to-day," said a beardless ensign, with a knowing look at the sky. "None whatever, I should say—might as well go home."

"Perhaps *you* might," replied an intimate and very charming acquaintance, his own captain; "perhaps *you* might," throwing considerable emphasis on the personal pronoun, and looking "for any good you're likely to do here;" but he did not say that.

"Not gone to town yet, my lord?" says a jolly old farmer, on a good-looking young horse, sidling up to Lord Fitzcourthope.

"No, Hobson, not yet. But I must be off next week. I'm about come to the end of my stud. The ground's hard, too, for tumbling." Hobson laughed.

"You've no call to be tumbling, if you'd ride horses a bit made, my lord, and don't be too hard on 'em. Now I've got one here o' my son's——"

"Likely-looking horse he is, too, Hobson; a pretty good bred one?"

"He's near thorough-bred, by Young Catten out of a Cotherstone mare; and he knows his business too, or I shouldn't be on him. Bless you! you don't see sich manners as these every day. He's a'most too good a hunter for you, my lord. I'm sure you like 'em a bit awkward." And

Hobson laughed at his own gentle impeachment of his lordship's taste.

"I'm getting older though every year; and if that horse is as good as he looks, I shouldn't mind sending him over to Ireland. He looks almost good enough to win a steeplechase."

"Get on him and ride him to-day, and I'll ride yours home after the find. I dare say he'll carry me safe till they begin to run. I shouldn't like to trust him over this rough country; but mine 'ull go anywhere."

After a little more chatting about the merits of himself, and his own brother, and his mother, and some more of the family which had been in Frank Hobson's hands, Lord Fitzcourthope got hold of his servant. He changed the stirrups and the horses, and after receiving his master's orders to see the ladies home safely as soon as the hounds had left the forest, which this part of the park was called, trotted back to keep watch on his charge.

"That's a good-looking horse, Fitz," said his old friend and brother sportsman, General Hardstone; "better than common. Looks like carrying you."

"He'll have to do so to-day if we've a run ; for Hobson has taken mine away, and I've sent my second horse home with the girls."

"Ah ! don't think we shall do much."

"Can't tell, I'm sure. Scent is quite as incomprehensible as woman. What's that!" and without waiting for the general's answer, Lord Fitzcourthope was over the boundary fence of the cover, and down a ride before the young Catten horse knew where he was. He had been handled for sale, but nobody had taken him quite so suddenly nor unceremoniously by the head as that, and he was half inclined to resent it. He thought better of it, however, and made straight for the hounds, which were beginning to score to cry. "There's a rare scent in cover," said his lordship, cramming on his hat, and sending his trial horse along through a rather deep ride. "I wonder whether the fellows who went home at four in the morning are quite so keen as they were with the Pytchley at Yelvertoft the day before yesterday."

The hounds were either very close to their fox, or there was a surprising scent. The master, a most uncompromising customer of

about fourteen stone in his pumps, who rode through a country better than most light-weights ride over it, was close to his hounds. One whip was at the farther corner of the long strip of woodland, and the other was bringing up some hounds from behind. The crowd had scarcely realised the existing conditions of the circumstances, but were now coming along the ride at some distance behind Lord Fitzcourthope, who neither looked to the right or the left, but kept on at his very best pace towards the end of the ride. At that moment a rattling halloo from the first whip proclaimed a break, and the hounds could not be thirty yards behind him. The master gave two or three very indefinite squeaks on his horn, partly to bring up the stragglers, but more to save appearances, and landed almost on his head in the thickest and blackest of thorns, which bounded the cover. Lord Fitzcourthope, still in the ride, turned the crop of his whip ready to swing open the white gate at the end of it. When within thirty or forty strides of it he saw an ominous chain surrounding it, which had been accidentally left on. There was no time to lose,

so shortening sail, and collecting his horse as well as he could in the given space, he cleared the gate, and turning short to the left found himself alongside of the hounds. It was a performance of which any man or horse might have been proud; but with remarkable taste Lord Fitzcourthope did not even look round to see the blank dismay on the faces of those who had followed him thus far and hopefully.

But I am not going to write a run (I would far rather ride one), or I might tell you how this man went to one place, and that one to another; how one got over where the master had made a hole, and another blocked up the only practicable corner by lying there, horse and all, until the lady's groom, with the miniature battle-axe, broke the chain in time to let the field through. We will not trouble ourselves with a ruck which never saw a yard of it; but will just give a sufficient account of those who took part in it to keep the reader's blood from stagnating till we come to the catastrophe. When the hounds broke their bristles were up, and the fox was just ahead of them; but he improved his position by the difficulties of

getting out of cover, which were far greater to his pursuers than to himself. On the right of the pack was a portion of the field who had been stationed on some vantage-ground, and who rode at once to the halloo. They now skirted in a body, riding for a point, with the exception of some eight or ten, whose only point in all runs was the leading hound. In front of these, and close to the hounds, was the master himself, and a little to his right, not interfering with the pack, but somewhat wide of them, rode Lord Fitzcourthope.

There was no time for conversation, nor is Bradden Forest the sort of country to encourage much of the coffee-room when hounds are once on their fox. Its staple features are granite rocks and rabbit holes, with the stubbs of hazels interspersed, where the woodmen have been busy the year before. No man either can accuse it of that levelness or equality of ground which the uninitiated are so apt to fancy is a distinguishing feature of the shires. It is a succession of abrupt precipices, only called hillocks by courtesy. All the obstacles to be met with actually in the limits of the forest

itself are stone walls, varying from three feet six to any height; here and there broken, but usually, where you want to go, well tipped with a good coping-stone. It is generally considered prudent by the hardest men to take time over it if possible; to pick your way in a network of pitfalls and squire-traps. But no man can account for the vagaries of scent, and now, instead of giving time to the anxious crowd behind, the hounds raced over the broken ground as if it had been Newmarket Heath. To be with them is the creed of some men at any price; and certainly Lord Fitzcourthope was one of these. The fencing qualities of his horse he had already proved, and at every fresh stride he felt more and more confident, as he allowed himself to be pulled at the cramped places and then set going again, in defiance of all difficulties. The pace was so good that it was not long before the boundaries of the forest came in view, and as the hounds entered one of the finest grass vales in Leicestershire, there seemed scarcely to be twenty men within hail. Nor were there. Ten minutes of the forest had shaken off everybody that got a start but

the really good-goers ; and as to the gentlemen who waited for the Lady of the Battle-axe, they had scarcely seen a hound since they left the cover. On they went over the vale, having nothing to stop them but a few acres of gorse, and most unmitigated severity of fencing. It varied its character now, for there were double posts and rails, bull-finches, staken-bound fences, the ditch to you, the ditch from you, oxers, and every other sort of hindrance calculated to produce discomfort to man and beast. Half an hour (nothing in a day) went by, and seemed already long enough for some of them. Another ten minutes, and a slight check ; it was enough to allow an unfortunate gentleman who had had a fall on one side to turn over on the other before they were off again. The master was said to be occasionally broad in his language. He had no opportunity of airing it to-day, and his weight was beginning to tell on the good horse that carried him ; and he jumped through his fences, and occasionally into them, more unmistakably than ever. The field was reduced ; and if a real check had occurred, there would have been no difficulty in counting noses. The

master was going well, but with more care than usual. The cornet of the night before held his own, and was a troublesome customer to shake off; he was heavier than most cornets (for this was not a light-weight country), and had more brains. A colonel of infantry was the only other representative of the service. Sir Everard Compton was there, and though his face was as imperturbable as Mont Blanc, he was absolutely wishing (a thing he had never had occasion to do in his life for anything) for his second horse. The Rev. Job Mucklestone, a most orthodox divine, who, not wanting to be ridden over, had sent the field all wrong at starting, and then descended on a favourite bridle-gate of his own, and the best professional horseman in England, a steeple-chase rider of the very highest character, on one of the master's horses, comprised the field. Within a hundred acres were ten more, and within a mile and a half some fifty, who were too *rusés* to be utterly nowhere. The first whip was still going.

But the man who had gone best was Lord Fitzcourthope. He had not only had the best of it, but his horse, up to this point, seemed

fresher than the rest. He knew better—at least he knew how near the end of his own he was, and only hoped that every one else might be as bad. It is a Christian-like amusement, to be sure, and promotes all the finest feelings of our nature.

“Where are we, Arundale?” says my lord, who was out of his bearings.

“That’s Winslow Paddocks; and if he gets there we shan’t kill him.”

“Can you do it?” replied Lord Fitzcourthope.

“No; I haven’t a puff left in me.” The pace had slackened a little. “You’ll have to kill him alone.”

“I’m nearly done myself. Hobson’s short of work; but I shall take him; he’s a wonderful jumper; but he’s been done this ten minutes.”

Here a sudden halloo from a shepherd, which (from the state of their horses, I am bound to say) was unheeded, showed them that they were running from scent to view.

“He’s gone down the hedge-side, and he’ll scarcely get to Winslow.”

One mile more and they were racing, and still the only men going were the whip and Lord

Fitzcourthope. The master was standing by his horse, whose tail and forelegs were out, stiff and uncompromising, while his heaving flanks were going fast as the hounds themselves. The infantry colonel was trotting, the cornet had his horse's nose stuck in a fence, and was unable to get him backwards or forwards. All were more or less beat, and the hounds were not able to raise more than a doubtful gallop.

At that moment Deloraine appeared. Nobody knew whence, as he afterwards admitted, he didn't know himself. By one of those extraordinary accidents which occur in fox-hunting, he had galloped on with a sort of desperate hope of catching them at a check, and, the hounds having turned towards him all the way, he had succeeded in catching them. Not having pressed his horse severely, he was perhaps the freshest of the lot.

"Deloraine, have you anything left in you? They'll kill him if you can get on to them. He's down the hedge-side; but they want to be taken through the fence. The shepherd sees him now," and catching sight of the shepherd pointing, gave the peer new life.

One more grass field; down he went a gentle incline, the whip on one side of him, Deloraine on the other, the hounds with new life in them. "There he goes, through the fence!" and true enough, as he crept into Winslow Paddocks, the hounds jumped and scrambled through the fence, and pulled him down in the open.

"War' wire!" said the whip, stopping his horse.

"Hold hard, my lord!" said Deloraine, checking himself; but it was too late.

Lord Fitzcourthope had ridden out in front of them, and in his eagerness neither saw the wires nor heard the warning. In one moment his horse's forelegs were twisted in the treacherous iron, which stretching, not breaking, wrapped round them like a vice, and the horse fell on the top of his rider, without a chance of saving himself. There they lay by the side of the quivering fox without sense or motion.



CHAPTER XIV.

HENRY DELORAINE ACCEPTS A RESPONSIBILITY.

FORD FITZCOURTHOPE was not killed, he was permanently crippled, though he was not at present informed of the extent of his injuries. For some days his life was despaired of; and when he recovered sufficiently to think at all, or to be questioned at all as to his own sensations, but little doubt remained of permanent injury to the spine.

“So much for wire-fencing,” said his lordship, on being told of the nature and cause of his fall. “I’ve often told them what would happen some day, and now they’ve killed the best horse out of condition I ever rode, and crippled—well, never mind, Catherine, don’t cry, it might have been worse. I might have been killed and the

horse crippled. Besides, who knows, perhaps, when I get to London they may be able to do more for me than down here."

But he knew better, and, what is more, Lady Catherine knew better; for when Scalpell had been sent for, and pocketed his cheque for a hundred for his night-journey into the shires, he had held a little conversation with Lady Honoria.

"Say nothing about it to him, my lady. The less despondency the better; but it would be wrong to conceal the truth from you or your family."

"Ought I to send for Courthope?" sobbed Lady Honoria. "He's electioneering somewhere. We have written, but is it so immediate?"

"Not at all, my dear madam; there is no immediate danger at all. Lord Fitzcourthope may live a long time yet—months, nay, even years, though the latter is dependent on other causes. But he will never walk or ride except in a carriage again. Lord Courthope need not be hurried. Indeed, it might impress the patient unfavourably if he came unexpectedly. Amuse him, and let him see cheerful society when he

is somewhat recovered from the shock. Don't tell him all the truth at present; but don't let any one encourage you with false hopes of a permanent recovery, the thing's impossible." Saying which, Dr. Scalpell bowed and shook hands, and got into the fly which was to post back with him to Leicester.

If Lady Honoria's has appeared a hard nature, as, indeed, it was in some parts of this history, she was gentle enough now. It was one of those cases which bring out all the goodness in woman. She had felt her true position somewhat acutely, and as long as her father could take care of himself, as long as he had his horses and houses, his shooting and society, his clubs, his politics, and all the enjoyments of a nobleman's life (paid for or not), that is, as long as he was independent of her assistance, she assumed or felt an indifference which gave her an unamiable character. Now she was wanted; there was something for her to do, somebody to soothe, to caress, to nurse, and that somebody was her father; and all her old love returned in all its force, such as it had existed and had shown itself before Myra came to usurp her old place

on Lord Fitzcourthope's knee. She and her sister set to work, as true and noble women can and do every day, to smother their own feelings, to give up, to sacrifice their time, their freedom, their plans, their commonest enjoyments and comforts—in poorer families their necessities—to procure some temporary diversion from brooding thought for their father, and to prolong any existing, or promote any new, sense of amusement or pleasure he could enjoy.

And on Lord Fitzcourthope himself the accident had acted differently from what might have been expected. He was less irritable, less disposed to exact than formerly. He exhibited a new virtue—patience; very new to his countrymen, singularly so to himself. When he was once convinced that he was a hopeless invalid, he accepted the situation with great courage. He seemed more contented with his lot than he had been for some time, and the necessity of retiring from the active exertion of borrowing money, or endeavouring to repay it, produced that spurious sort of satisfaction which a cat in a corner may feel in the face of a terrier dog when he knows he may be saved from perse-

cution by circumstances, but that no efforts of his own will avail to profit him.

Lady Honoria's temperament hitherto, for it scarcely amounted to character, had some excuses in the externals of her position. She had had, since Lady Fitzcourthope's death, all the weight of the household upon her own shoulders. There are some shoulders fitter to bear it than others; and very few female shoulders of my acquaintance that would be unwilling to try. But in her case the circumstances of a large establishment, high rank, external splendour, had been accompanied by exceptional difficulties. She had no command of ready money. Castle Courthope was eminently impecunious. Lady Honoria felt all the disadvantages of duns, process-servers, impoverished tenants, and a decaying grandeur, without having contributed in any degree to bring about such a state of things. She was honest to the backbone, and never knew on whom to visit the shortcomings which so provoked and galled her. Besides, she was properly proud, had an independent spirit of her own, which was constantly at war

with her dealings. And she never visited these irritabilities on the right causes. Her father was extravagant, indifferent, self-indulgent. Her brother kept race-horses, had bachelor's lodgings in town, played, and lived altogether as if he had five times the income he possessed. They both had a fine liberal manner with other people's money; both were witty and polished, and they gained credit for not only butchers' meat and clothing, but for half the virtues to which punctilious men, who pay their debts, never aspire. Lady Honoria never blamed them. They were part and parcel of the Fitzcourthopes, and could do no wrong. As to her ancestors, it never occurred to her that gentlemen in such resplendent suits, and such flowing wigs, and ladies in such becoming toilettes, and so well painted by the best artists of their several epochs, could have left a legacy of dependence to their posterity. If she could have fallen foul of the old courtier who lost one hundred thousand pounds at a sitting at the Kildare Club, her respected grandfather, or the scapegrace in scarlet and gold, who ran matches at Newmarket for half his income at a time with Colonel

Kelly; or her great-uncle, who played piquet for his wife's fortune, and shot himself because the trustees declined to raise more than sixty thousand pounds of the money, she might have been happier. But she could not. So she kept all the gall of bitter dependence and subterfuge to herself, and suffered accordingly. She had just those virtues which were not appreciated at Castle Courthope, and was accredited with a certain hardness and severity, which in another country would have made her estimable, and under happier circumstances would have never existed at all.

The Earl himself was much changed. Misfortune, ill-health particularly, is calculated to show either the best or worst side of a man's character. In this case it was the former. He wondered that he had never before discovered the comforts of a home, and the pleasures he might have derived from intercourse with his own family. Lord Courthope had shared his amusements, but there was not much more affection between them than might have existed between two intimate friends, of different ages and the same pursuits. Pecuniary difficulties

had not tended to strengthen the bonds. They seldom do. But they had never openly differed; and, to say the truth, they were both sufficiently proud of their faults not to look with much severity on each other on that account. They had both sufficient delicacy to keep their monetary transactions from one another; and it was a comfort to Lord Courthope to know that they could meet upon equal terms, without any of that degradation which belongs to family bickerings on the score of money. The estate was strictly entailed, and no amount of pressure had ever urged the old man to relieve himself at the expense of his son.

He was not only changed in mind, but in health. Since his removal to town, which took place early in the summer, although he felt no pain, his friends, who saw him but occasionally, did not fail to comment on his gradual decay. He aged rapidly in appearance, and even his wit and good spirits seemed so uncertain and variable as to resemble the bright flickering of a flame before its total extinction.

Deloraine was, of course, a constant visitor at the house which Lord Fitzcourthope occupied. It was a fine evening, and Lord Fitzcourthope

and his guest were sitting, without lights, over their claret. There was a small fire still in the grate, but the windows were open. The ladies had left the room, and Lord Courthope had not dined at home. The invalid had not been in his usual spirits at dinner, and as he lay back in the large *chaise longue*, propped by pillows, his attenuated hands and delicate features told of decay. There was no suffering, however, and he wore as pleasant a smile as if he were undisturbed by any but the most ordinary considerations.

"Put the claret nearer to Mr. Deloraine, Kempson. We shall not want candles at present. Turn my chair a little towards the fire. Thank you. I will ring for coffee. You need not wait." And Kempson left the room.

The Earl cleared his throat, but did not immediately speak, though the absence of the lamp was favourable to his purpose.

At length Henry Deloraine said: "You're not suffering to-night, my lord?"

"Not in the least. I'm happy to say I never do. Can you see to fill your glass by the fire-light? It's some of the castle claret. I must

get you to fill my glass too. I'm afraid I'm troublesome; but I sent Kempson away."

"Don't mention it. I'm glad to be of service."

"Upon my word, I believe it, Deloraine; and I'm going to tax your powers."

Deloraine rose, imagining that the Earl only required some readjustment of his chair or pillows.

"No, no, my good fellow. Sit still. It's something more serious. Do you know, Deloraine, I'm no coward; and I've looked this terrible accident in the face pretty bravely, but——" Here he paused, and Deloraine replied—

"Oh, my lord, let us hope for some years of a happy life, if not an active one."

"If good nursing would do it," and here the Earl's voice trembled; "but you know that as well as any one. I never knew what a home was till I was obliged to stop in it. No; I wanted to speak to you about one part of my affairs, which presents some distinct features. You have seen Myra Gray at the castle?"

If Lord Fitzcourthope liked the twilight of the summer evening, it was not less agreeable just now to Deloraine. Had he ever seen Myra Gray

at the castle? Well, he recollected Miss Gray, "a pretty little girl, that used to ride so well with the castle harriers."

"Ah, Myra! Indeed she did. Dear little Myra! I should like to see her."

"Then why not send for her? I have heard she is somewhere in Germany. Nothing could be easier." In fact, Deloraine began to hope that he was likely to be sent to fetch her.

"No, no; not at present. We think she may probably come home in the winter; but, between ourselves, she and Lady Honoria didn't get on so well together as I could have wished. I think it might hurt Honoria's feelings, and I wouldn't have that done for anything. But there is something I want to say to you, Deloraine, about Myra Gray. Should you object to act as a trustee, a sort of guardian to her? though there's not much to guard. Tell me that first—should you object? then I'll tell you all about her."

Deloraine's heart beat faster. He certainly did not object to be anything that could serve Lord Fitzcourthope, or—or—Miss Gray.

"The circumstances are simple enough. She

has lived at the castle ever since her father died. He was an old friend of mine. As she was a baby, the few thousands she had, and which would not have kept her, have accumulated."

Deloraine smiled mentally at anything accumulating at Castle Courthope, especially money. Was his friend romancing? However, he listened.

"She has ten thousand pounds, which is really her own. I have arranged that it shall be realised at once upon my death. In other words, will you undertake to hold it in trust till her marriage or till the age of twenty-one?"

Deloraine waited a moment. It was a disagreeable position for him in some respects; but it was not unpleasant to be associated with Myra Gray in any way. And ten thousand pounds! What a sum to raise a suspicion about! Yet Deloraine knew the world very well; and, suppose he wanted to marry the girl! At length he said slowly, and dropping the words out, "Yes, I will."

"You ought to know what you undertake; for, I suppose, your recollection of the child is

but hazy; and she's grown up now, and was to be presented this season. It must be next."

"I recollect Myra Gray very well. You know I was often with you."

"Yes, yes; but she was a mere child. Now, I'll tell you what I know of her." And the Earl drank off his claret, and pushed the decanter towards Deloraine.

"She is warm-hearted and impulsive, remarkably so for an English woman; but, then, she has been brought up entirely among us."

"Bringing a donkey up in a stable won't make it a horse."

"No; but the food and associations would make it far above the average donkey, you know."

Deloraine admitted so far with an acquiescent laugh, and said, "Your illustration is not complimentary to Englishwomen."

"I've the highest opinion of women of all nations," said the Earl; "but I prefer my own. However, to return to your ward. She is as truthful as she is impulsive."

"Then she has some English characteristics!" thought Deloraine; but it would not have been

polite to tell Lord Fitzcourthope so in his own house.

"I never," continued he, "knew any girl so thoroughly to be depended on. The money, you see, will give her some four or five hundred a year, if judiciously managed; keep her above want, wherever she may be. And I think so pretty a girl may find a good husband without the very questionable advantage of a small fortune."

"Possibly," said the other, drily, and refilling his glass; "and where's she to live?"

"Faith, my dear Deloraine, I have not provided for that. If Courthope marries, Honoria and Catherine might give her a home with them; for she knows Ireland better than she does England. But not long ago I had an offer from a relation of her father, Mrs. Treby, somewhere in the west."

"Galway? What a place for a small heiress!"

"No; England. West of England. They're English people, who offered to receive her. It came soon after my fall; and sounded like an ominous presage. For she could only have been thinking of my death."

"*Annosa cornix.* Let me fill your glass, my lord. I've no faith in omens."

"Nor I, my good fellow, unless they're like the Delphic oracles, prophetic of a foregone conclusion." Here the Earl smiled and sighed. "I'm afraid it's very much my case. However, there's your bargain, if you like it. It will relieve my mind of a little anxiety, and I'm sure I leave the girl in good hands. You shall have the letters, addresses, and all instructions another time, if you say yes."

Deloraine was one of those men who either undertook a thing heartily or not at all. So he said at once: "With all my heart, my lord. If she has a female relation to fall back upon, I don't anticipate much trouble. And if she should——" Here Deloraine hesitated.

"Marry, you were going to say. True, the sooner the better for you. You'll be saved all trouble of every sort or kind. Marriage is less certain than death. It's an advantage the latter has over the former; but we don't know when either may happen."

"If they must come, the one should be early, the other late."

"True. Many thanks, Deloraine. Be so good as to ring, and we'll ask for our coffee down here. One move will be as much as I can stand to-night."

Just then Lord Courthope knocked at the door, and was shown into the dining-room.

"Ah! Courthope," said the Earl, lighting up at his son's cheerful voice. "How are you? Have you been dining at the club? You've not had such a bottle of Mouton as we have, I'll be bound to say."

"Probably not, sir. I've been down to Newmarket; and your colt for next year's Derby looks magnificently. He's doing gentle work, and will be out for the Criterion."

"Does he? You think he is worth backing for a trifle?"

"I intend to back him myself; and he'll have plenty of friends if he goes on well."

"It's early days for that, at all events."

"So it is; but there's some one been nibbling already. I could get nothing out of Flescher; but some Mr. Ferrers, they tell me, has taken forty-five to one."

“Has he, indeed? What a fool he must be!”

Then Kempson arrived with the coffee, and that put an end to the conversation for the present. Whether Mr. Ferrers was a fool or not time will show.





CHAPTER XV.

THREE ARE COMPANY.

GILBERT FERRERS had grown into a costly, luxurious dog. He had that talent for extravagance which does not belong to all men. He liked everything, even things that he knew nothing about, as pictures, snuff-boxes, Louis Quatorze trinkets, and valuable missals. There was a positive pleasure to him in spending money, with a total indifference as to the means by which he acquired it.

His bachelor rooms in Piccadilly were obvious illustrations of the fact; and in some respects highly characteristic of him. Turkey carpet of the best quality and very brightest pattern, easy chairs more easy than common, statuettes and pictures of considerable value, some of them;

and of most questionable taste. The nude was not in him a love of beauty or of form, it was the nourishment of a meretricious mind. Upon the lower and more sensual he dwelt with the greater gusto ; the fact of its having cost more than he could afford to pay was only a secondary source of gratification. With all his external refinement of dress, of manner, or of appanage, he was at heart of vicious taste. He could love nothing for its intrinsic excellence ; neither men, women, nor furniture. He loved all when they appealed to his grosser feelings.

The season was over, it was a hot evening in August, and he was in London still, as the seat of his operations. He had a real talent for business, and had risen at the desk in the banking house of Blunt, Pickham, and Co. Delicate negotiations were sometimes conducted in that establishment, and his services had been found eminently useful. A man in such a position is worth just what he can do in London, and not what he has been. So few inquiries were made as to Gilbert Ferrers' antecedents ! Doubtless he would have answered them satisfactorily, and untruthfully.

He pretended to no inclination for field-sports. The whole of Scotland might have been one large moor or deer forest to be had for the journey to Perth, as far as he was concerned. He would not have given the price of a railway ticket to enjoy it. The best stud in England might have stood at his disposal for the season in Leicestershire; it would have continued to stand in its stable till the first of April of the following year, unless money could have been made of it at the hammer. Poor Jack Cartridge, who occupied the next desk to him at Blunt's, would have given half his salary, if he had dared to do so, for a holiday to be spent in the Highlands. Peter Ridinghouse, a cadet of a county family, walked about almost cursing the cabmen and their employers, who tantalised him with their gun-cases and portmanteaus on the way to the Great Northern Terminus. But Gilbert Ferrers stopped in London with a willing, if not with a quiet mind.

To-night he lolled back in his chair, and smoked his cigar and sipped his claret with the air of a millionaire; and he really smiled to himself when he realised his own situation,

and wondered what old and young Blunt, and Pickham, the Member for Easing, would have thought if they could have seen him. It is no use to conceal from the reader that Gilbert was a great rascal ; but then he was a very presentable one, and in his own sphere rather a superior article.

Percy Hardman, who sat opposite to him, was not at all the same sort of person. He was a vulgar rascal ; just as bad ethically as Gilbert Ferrers, but socially, and considered with a view to the picturesque, essentially worse. He looked it all over ; when he spoke he spoke coarsely of his iniquities ; he dressed the character of the flash villain to perfection ; his hands were coarse and rude, calculated for the forcible entry of strong boxes ; his feet could never have escaped through gyves ; and he carried with him cheap jewellery enough for an Australian digger or a successful bagman on circuit. In moral or immoral qualities they were about equal. In danger the latter would have turned at bay, like a rat in a corner, and dealt about him cruelly and bloodthirstily. The former would have undertaken the more

desperate enterprise, and would have done the butchery in a more melodramatic manner. Hardman might have been formed on a model of Bill Sykes, allowing for difference of external circumstances; Ferrers on that of Paul Clifford, and the dandy highwayman of the *haute école*.

"Capital claret," said Mr. Percy Hardman, playing with a guard-chain nearly the size of a skipping-rope, studded with carbuncles, and swallowing a glassful.

"I'm glad to have your opinion, because you must be a judge."

"I can't think how you do it, d——d if I can," continued he, not noticing the sarcasm of Gilbert Ferrers, and striking the table simultaneously with the oath.

And as his language was tolerably well strengthened with imprecations, I shall spare the reader the infliction by allowing him to supply them.

"You'll know soon, for I want to talk to you about it; I've had a bad time of it lately, and the bills must be renewed."

"Of course; but you can't renew bills for ever."

"That depends entirely upon circumstances. You can get these renewed, and you must, or try another name, if you like it better."

"Impossible! What for? I don't benefit by it." And Percy Hardman looked somewhat sulky at the proposition.

"Ha! ha! not benefit by it! You like claret, cigars, and your own pleasures; and you have them."

"Yes; but if I am to put my head in a noose, and take all the risk, I should like all the benefit." And he helped himself to another glass and lit a fresh cigar, which he began smoking with great vehemence. Like other fires which blaze up fiercely, it ended in smoke. After a minute Ferrers rejoined—

"Come, come, Hardman, be reasonable. All the risk! Don't I share it?"

"No," said he; but he said it with less irritability.

"You know I do. If they're not met in some way or other I shall have my share of the penalty, whatever it is. If you have been so weak—well, strong—no—well, unfortunate as to have——" and here Gilbert Ferrers threw a

very marked intelligence into his voice and features, which looked pale enough, but determined, by the light of the single lamp on the table.

"Stay; look here, Ferrers. We've had enough of this."

"Why begin it then? It must end in the same way. You can get the money. I often have, as you know; just now I can't. I shall not ask how, but the five hundred must be had by Monday, or—well, it's difficult to know what will be the consequences. I shall have no more claret like that, and you will have—but never mind, you'll do it. And now tell me about Rattlesnake, Lord Fitzcourthope's colt for next year's Derby."

"He goes well," said the other, relinquishing his point much as a weak but ill-tempered dog relinquishes a bone. "He'll win the Clearwell, and then you can get all your money off for the Derby at a good price."

"That's something. And now, as we can't get any ready money out of that, what does Trapman say about the Cambridgeshire favourite?"

"Safe as if he was in the boiling pot. I had to pay for it; but it's done. He can't play us false. But don't talk to him: he doesn't like it, and he's obliged to be cautious. If too much money goes into the market against him, it'll blow the gaff."

"Can you lay it?"

"I have; and as there are no goldfinches to find, pretty handsomely. I told him I should be here to-night, and he's to call for me; but you must know nothing about it."

"I don't expect to die of too much knowledge while I'm in your hands or his; but you know what I expect out of it. The rest you may share between you." Gilbert Ferrers was not in a good humour, though he never allowed his temper to interfere with his interests. However, he could not help irritating or frightening his companion. Hardman had drunk pretty freely, and was assuming a tone of familiarity which partnership in guilt would have warranted; but the partnership Gilbert Ferrers was not disposed to admit.

Then they smoked on in silence, the one with a cold sneer on his handsome face which did not

add to its beauty, though it was the sort of thing of which he felt a little proud. He had read in books how fine it was, and he quite believed in its power over his victim; but that was not the cause of his influence. The other sat with his legs stretched out, with a dark scowl on his face, honest if not agreeable.

"And now for the winter campaign which you held out as so profitable."

"So it is; it's worth thousands—a comfortable income for life. And what you like as much, Gilbert Ferrers, you'll be a swell—a director—a manager—a great man in the City; and you'll have your brougham, and your horses, and your——"

"Thank you. Quite enough for one man. You needn't enumerate its virtues. What is it?" and Ferrers really exhibited some curiosity about it.

"Ah, that's another matter altogether. You'd like to know what it's worth."

"As a matter of curiosity."

"What will you give for it? It's no use to me; but if I work it, you'll pay."

“Handsomely. But I should like to know what it is before I answer.”

“And I should like a distinct answer before I tell. It’s not in my line.”

Gilbert Ferrers did not look out of temper; but he answered again, with his cold, imperturbable sneer—

“I should think a gentleman whose name and handwriting are so like his own father’s as yours, is very likely to find a line of his own some day.”

The other was cowed in a moment, and then Ferrers added significantly—

“Now you’ll tell me, I’m sure, Mr. Percy Hardman. So help yourself, and let us have your scheme.”

Upon which, with a voice and manner which had lost with its self-confidence some of its vulgarity, this rascal propounded a plan by which, with the assistance of some thousands of ready money to start with, a variety of bubble companies were to be formed, of which Gilbert Ferrers was to have the direction. A gigantic swindle was to be perpetrated; names were to be fraudulently got, where they could not be

honestly obtained; false prospectuses were to be issued; and, to make assurance doubly sure, they were to be connected with a gang engaged in the manufacture of fictitious bills of exchange. So clear and so extensive was the scheme of robbery, and so fortified by the boldness of the collateral defences, that never in his life had Percy Hardman appeared to Gilbert Ferrers so nearly upon an equality with himself. His respect for the half-intoxicated and unscrupulous swindler had increased to a degree of which he believed himself to be incapable.

"And you say money—ready money—must be had for this?"

"You can't float a vessel of such tonnage in a mill-stream."

"True." And Ferrers added thoughtfully, "And how much?"

"Five thousand might do; ten would be better."

"And you can't get so much as that?"

"Impossible," said the other. "My father's name has done us good service already, Ferrers, and will be used pretty freely in this business; for you know he stands well with these specu-

lators. I cannot do anything more direct about it. I'm going in for a small share of the profits; but you know I don't care much about the Row and Belgravia. I'm all for a jolly life, and hate to be bored. Now, as you're going to have the lion's share of the plunder——"

"And of the work," said Gilbert Ferrers.

"Work! Did you ever know a director or a manager do any work? You'll come down twice a week in your brougham at eleven or twelve o'clock, and go back again at three. It's your quiet, honest men, who are not behind the scenes, that do the work. I tell you what; these City fellows can put you into what will be worth money, so you must try to find it, or I must carry my scheme to some one who can. Only they want somebody with a sort of—well, some appearance and flash; and you've got that."

"You're quite complimentary."

"I didn't mean to be; but we've pulled together a long time since I was turned out of the bank for a slight mistake, and you were promoted to a vacant desk for keeping your mouth shut and your eyes open. We can't

afford to separate ;” and here Mr. Percy Hardman became so familiar, and winked in so impertinent a manner, that Gilbert Ferrers half rose from his seat. An abusive retort was on his lips, when a knock at the door silenced the one and calmed the other. “Come in,” said he.

A decent-looking woman opened the door, and said, “A gentleman in the passage inquiring for Mr. Hardman, sir ; and as your servant is out, sir——”

“Is he a gentleman, Mrs. Brittles ?” asked Ferrers.

“Well, sir, I can’t say, sir. His boots is very bright, sir, and his hat is——”

“That’s the man ; show him up,” said Hardman, as if the room was his own. “Show him up. It’s Trapman, bless you. Gentleman ! I rather think he is. You should have shown him into the parlour, Mrs. Brittles. D—— it, he’s in the hall all this time !” and Percy Hardman exhibited signs of impatience.

“I suppose he’s used to waiting in the hall. It’s not raining indoors nor out,” replied Ferrers, exceedingly disgusted again with his now too free and easy accomplice.

"He don't wait in the hall at his master's house, I'll lay a couter. No, no! He knows a deal too much for that, I can tell you."

"Well, then, let him come up." And accordingly in two minutes more the bright and creaking boots of Mr. Trapman were heard on the stairs. The step sounded sufficiently assured as it followed the stealthy list-slippered sort of tread of the landlady, and the owner of the boots followed very closely upon the opening of the door. Hardman rose partially, and then said "Good evening, Trapman; I thought you wouldn't mind coming round by Mr. Ferrers' rooms, to walk home with me." Ferrers, at the mention of his name, sat upright from a lounging position, and surveying the intruder coolly, turned to Hardman, and said, "Won't Mr. Trapman sit down?" And Mr. Trapman answered the invitation by taking the corner of a chair.

"Won't your friend come round to the table, Hardman? Would he prefer claret or sherry? or perhaps something hot, as the evenings have begun to get chilly?" Mr. Gilbert Ferrers' reception did not add to their warmth, and few

men that saw the three together would have imagined that there was a very close secret between them, on which some thousands depended. In Ferrers' case it was, indeed, rather implied or understood than expressed: and he acted his part before the trainer in a manner that gave that gentleman the highest opinion of his ability.

When Mr. Trapman advanced to the light, there was very little doubt as to his calling—none at all as to his capacity for it. He was a tall, thin man, of forty years of age: his hair was closely cut, and very neatly kept; it recalled the glories of the water-brush and the curry-comb; his eyes were sharp and bright, restless, long, and partially closed, as against the light, which he ought to have hated; his nose was like his body, long and thin, towards the end red, blushing for its involuntary prominence; his mouth and chin characteristic enough—the former close, thin, compressed; the latter sharp, hard, angular. He had a disposition towards Yankeeism in his general appearance, and the strongest peculiarity of his features was cunning, or self-preservation. His eyes had a

way of looking behind him, and he would have been timid but for counterbalancing qualities of another kind.

It was true his boots were very bright—very bright indeed for that time of night—and his feet large enough to show them; and his hat ought to have been equally bright, for he brushed it incessantly with his elbow. His clothes were of a popular brown; his trousers very tight, but the rest of his costume light and easy. His waistcoat was adorned with fancy buttons, and his necktie of blue and white spots with a most elaborate horseshoe pin. He carried in his mouth a toothpick (not a quill, but of American wood), and his close-fitting trousers were strapped beneath his double-soled boots with very narrow straps of black leather. A well-to-do horsey man, livery-stable keeper of the Oxford Street pattern, or a stud-groom in search of a master, was marked in every button.

Gilbert Ferrers, who was manifestly out of order this evening, and who—what with want of money and his friend's perception of it—had some cause for his irritability, recollected himself a little as he felt that self-restraint might be

of considerable service to him. Mr. Trapman was too free and independent an elector to be bullied, but he was just the sort of man to be cajoled, and Ferrers determined to set about it.

He knew that gin and water hot, with lemon and sugar, would have been most to Mr. Trapman's material taste; but he knew also that an offer of claret, with the assumption that that was his normal drink, would flatter and tickle Mr. Trapman, and tenfold if it were done in the presence of Mr. Percy Hardman. So he asked him to take a glass of claret.

"You can have anything else—sherry or spirits and water; but I suppose you prefer claret."

"Eh? I'll just taste your claret. I drink the best I can buy." Which was perfectly true; and many people, not trainers or turfites, wondered by what means he managed to pay for it. He came originally from the north country, and had left a Lancashire stable, in which his antecedents had not been so creditable as they might have been.

After some desultory conversation on the beauty of the night, the prospects of the

partridge season, and the emptiness of London, they turned to racing. It was innocently done by Hardman, who had a trifle on this horse and a trifle on the other, and very naturally desired to know Mr. Trapman's opinion of the impending St. Leger.

"It won't go into your stable this time, Trapman," remarked Percy Hardman. "I've backed Sister to Nightingale to win and The Brigand for a place."

"Yer wrong. The Brigand's coughing, and the Sister to Nightingale won't win."

"She can," said Percy Hardman, "if her head's loose."

"They're always loose on the big races; but there's a deal of milking done in handicaps. It's amazin' the nonsense that's talked about the strings, and Mr. Armsthong, and sic fuleery, to be sure." And here Mr. Trapman looked indignantly virtuous, and took a drink.

"Do you ever smoke, Mr. Trapman?" said Gilbert Ferrers, offering him a cigar at the same time, which he took as if it were not the first by many hundreds. He drew a knife

from his pocket solemnly, cut a nick in the end, smoothed it down artistically, and, having lighted it carefully, crossed his legs as if he were in for the evening. His very large feet and shiny boots were conspicuous enough.

"You've nothing in for the big handicaps yourself now, Trapman," said Percy Hardman, with an intelligent wink, "nothing that can win."

"Naething that can win! weel, they ha' made a favourite for the Cambridgeshire; but he may do anything by that time. Eh! he'd go a roarer, or, or,—you ken weel, they're dalgate things is hosses." And Mr. Trapman took another glass of claret and turned his cigar.

"But Termagant? you know he can win, if he likes, and he's first favourite."

"Eh! he'll like to win; but they ha' made him fust favourite ha' they? I ken naething about it. I havena been to Tattersall's this month."

"And you don't mean to back him?"

"What will ye lay yourself, Mr. Hardman? You're a sporting gentleman, and don't mind laying the odds sometimes."

"I'd rather back something good."

"Ye're wrong — althegither wrong. Lay against him, mon. It's the layers that mak' both ends meet. Lay against him, and put me down twa thousand. It's not much; but if we're na' able to get on when the day comes, well——"

"And why can't you get on now, Mr. Trapman?" asked Gilbert, with an appearance of innocence, which imposed upon Trapman.

"Because small gains and certain is valuable. You'd better make a certainty of five hundred than run the risk o' double the money."

"My friend's no racing man, Mr. Trapman, so the conversation isn't interesting to him. What shall you be satisfied to get out of the transaction?"

"We're game for a run—but—you see—" and he looked askance at Gilbert, who sat still, saying nothing.

"My friend, I tell you, understands nothing of racing, Trapman. Now what would you do?"

"Are we tiled?"

"Undoubtedly," said Percy, "help yourself."

"Eh! it's to help other people you've got me here, Mr. Percy," and here he looked at his claret between his hand and the light. "If the odds are shorter you'll stand a monkey to make it smooth."

"How many more are to stand a monkey?" inquired Hardman.

"That just depends; but ye'll no do harm, if ye'll hould your tongue."

"I'm an interested party, so don't be afraid."

"It's just your interested parties that spoil the sport. Hold yer tongue, and ye'll do no harm wi' a pound or two agin the colt. Ye'll have to lay long odds noo; but it's a certainty, and ye've plenty o' time to get round."

"Any news in the papers or elsewhere?" said Gilbert Ferrers.

"Yes. I called in Wilton Terrace as I came by, and there's one o' the nominations gone for next year."

"You know that? What a fellow you are, Trapman, for smelling out a stench. However, it's not likely to break many books, I suppose."

"That's what I canna tell. But Lord Fitz-

courthope died this afternoon suddenly." He had not finished his speech before Ferrers and Hardman were both upon their legs at once.

"Lord Fitzcourthope!"—here Ferrers added an oath—"forty monkeys to one! He was the best horse in the race, though he's never been out yet. And you say Lord Fitzcourthope is dead. Why he was out in the carriage during the season, and getting quite well. That's a heavy disappointment. He'd have been at two to one before the day. And I had twenty thousand to five hundred."

"That's a vara heavy sum for a gentleman that knows nothing o' racing, Mr. Ferrers; and ye made a vara good shot for an outsider, let me tell ye."

Gilbert Ferrers saw that he had committed himself, so he made a virtue of necessity, and exposed his hand. "I heard of the trial, and it was good enough to win nineteen Derbies out of twenty."

"Ye'll maybe be a friend o' the owner, or his son, then?" Ferrers shook his head. "It wasn't Tom Samson, nor his jockey, I'll be bound. They're close enough."

"No, it wasn't, you're right; but I got the information from an undoubted source, and I dare say you know it was correct."

"I'd just heard a whisper of it. But there's naething reliable now. They're all bad. There's the ring and the gentlemen, they'll either on 'em rob ye; and the jockeys and the stable-lads, they'll any on 'em rob ye, if they can. It's a bad trade, there's not an honest man among them."

"Except the trainers, Mr. Trapman. You forget them," said Ferrers bitterly.

"Nay, Mister Ferrers, I didna forget them; but we'd mak' no hand at it at all if we didn't learn their tricks, just to tak' care o' our masters' interests, and—and—our own." And here Mr. Trapman blew his nose loudly with an indignant sort of blow; but it served the purpose of concealing his face. "And you'd backed him for a lot o' money?" added he, after a pause.

"Indeed I had," replied the other irritably. Upon which Mr. Percy Hardman uttered an indignant oath, and applied himself again to the cigar-box.

“Stay, you’ll have an opportunity to get out in the next six months. Who laid you the money? Nelson, did he? He’d never have paid you, he couldn’t ha’ found it; and he’d a had no chance o’ laying it off. But don’t back ’em any more, there’s nought to be gained by backing on ’em. Lay agen ’em, Mr. Ferrers, lay agen ’em, there’s nothin’ so profitable as layin’ agen the dead ’uns.”

“Have you got one in your stable that you can recommend?” said Ferrers almost fiercely, for he was considerably nettled by the news he had heard.

“I think I can show you one for the Cambridgeshire; but the exhibition’s an expensive one. However, come down, Mr. Ferrers, and you’ll find me reasonable enough. I owe your friend Hardman a turn; his father did me one once when I lived in the north, and I haven’t forgotten it. But don’t know too much, Mr. Ferrers. It’s worse to know too much than to know too little. But I think you may be trusted to walk alone. Now, Mr. Hardman, if ye want my company homewards you’d better be moving. I’m off again to-morrow early,

and I think I should like to go to bed." Saying which Mr. Trapman woke up Hardman, who was dozing off into a nap, and giving three or four elaborate polishes to his hat, descended the stairs with his companion.

"Lord Fitzcourthope dead!" said he to himself. "Well! it's bad to look at as a commercial transaction, but there are two sides to look at after all."





CHAPTER XVI.

LORD FITZCOURTHOPE'S DEATH CAUSES REFLECTIONS IN MORE BREASTS THAN ONE.

WHEN Gilbert Ferrers was left alone he lit another cigar, and leaning back in his arm-chair, began to review his prospects. Lord Fitzcourthope's death was a great disappointment, or rather the voidance of his Derby nomination was so. For the suborned stable-boy had told the truth; and, as he rode the horse, he knew what the trial had been. They had, unfortunately, not disguised the weights, for they had as yet no idea what a horse they had in the stable.

With Mr. Trapman Ferrers saw there was no disguise. For some reason or other the first favourite for the Cambridgeshire was as good as

in the boiling-house, and the information was worth just so much as could be got out of him without suspicion, till he had answered his milking purposes. It was a certainty, and should be looked after at once. This is no compliment whatever to Trapman himself, nor was the previous remark intended as such. He would not have committed an unprovoked attack upon personal rights as Gilbert Ferrers would have done, and he was not impervious to the feelings of an honest man upon extraneous subjects when rightly put before him. He was only firmly persuaded that the horse, as such, was sent into this world as a medium for trickery—not robbery—and he acted according to his light.

When Gilbert Ferrers reviewed his position and his prospects, they were found to amount to this—a vast amount of luxury, with every prospect of its continuance, unpaid for! No childish feeling of respect for himself or regard for others ever induced him to pay a debt. The sheriff's officer or the county court were his only monitors. He had a fair salary from his bank as a sort of confidential clerk, which sup-

plied pocket-money, servants' wages, rent, and horse-flesh—those necessities of life which would be too charming but for the necessity of paying for them. That, however, was very much within his notions of even a competency. There was the certain loss upon the voidance of the Derby nomination, and a disappointment to the amount of some thousands, according to hedging price. And there was Mr. Trapman's plausible offer, which could be, and seemed to be, a certainty, to be bought at a price, with a risk. "Suppose he suddenly turned honest?" said Gilbert to himself. But he dismissed the thought as the ugly but impossible nightmare which only terrifies us while we are not quite ourselves. Suppose he took it into his head to die. That might happen though he was hardly fit for it; and then the fate of the first favourite might be differently managed. His new trainer or master (in the present case it was the same thing) might keep him where he was, and obstinately persist on his winning, notwithstanding the fact of his being the best horse. And then where would he be? Altogether Gilbert began to think that racing was not a game to make

money at unless you could pull the strings yourself. I mean metaphorically; for pulling the strings has a very ominous and unmarionettic meaning attached to it. The next thing that occurred to him—and in the dim light of a paraffine lamp which would not burn, and a cigar which burnt very well, his thoughts came up in a modified form and succession like the ghosts of Richard III.'s victims—was the scheme for permanent wealth springing from that paradise of provision, Bread Street, Cheapside. What a name! What halcyon dreams of perpetual feasting, and at what a cost! The turf sounded healthful and recreative, and its associations might be those of the village green and the peaceful churchyard. But the City! (whence came Whittington and his cat), whose streets were paved with gold! whence the names of Turnover, Burny, and Company? Where was Lombard Street and the china orange? And who transacted the business of Mortem, Peters, and the Widow and Orphan's Fund? Surely it was the City.

From that point it was not difficult to proceed. A director! What a stretch of imagina-

tion to us as we sit at home writing for our publisher! What must it have been to Gilbert Ferrers? What a hop, skip, and a jump, for a confidential banker's clerk, of good manners and no principles! Chairman and manager, or treasurer, through whose fingers pass so much that represents wealth, and is convertible into bank-notes! M.P. for ———, by whose influence how many nice little jobs may be perpetrated, and how much lucrative patronage he disseminated among grateful electors or hungry and interested claimants! And then the long series of dinners and *déjeûners* at the houses of the aristocrats, who all want something, and who think that the City and the House of Commons divide between them the wealth and the power of the country.

Gilbert Ferrers, as he knocked off the ashes of his cigar to save his waistcoat, had almost begun to consider how he should behave on board days to his fellow-directors; whether he should smile blandly, bringing the elegance of his West-end manners to bear upon these moneyed Cits, or whether he should carry to the West-end a pompous, business-like tyranny

which imposes itself upon so many as so much honesty only spoilt by the setting. He had decided upon his liveries—dark green and gold—and upon the class of horses it would become him to drive when his income reached six or seven thousand a year. A successful director, he thought, should ride nothing but a short-legged, well-bred cob, not under one hundred and eighty guineas worth—safety its first requisite.

And all this was to be had for the small charge of about two years' income, for so Gilbert Ferrers put it—five thousand pounds, or from that to ten. Nor was Lord Fitzcourthope's death wanting to suggest a means by which some such sum might be obtained. It was necessary, now that the moment for action had arrived, to deal no longer in generalities. That is the poet's business; a good, prosy man of the world looks to particulars. The thing would be now, not only to ascertain the exact amount of Myra Gray's fortune, but the manner in which it could be made available to his purpose; whether, and how, it was settled upon her, and what power she had over it. Of Myra Gray

herself he need entertain no doubt. Mathilde von Robeck had been a very honest and industrious tout, and had not allowed him to remain ignorant of the power he possessed over her pupil's mind. He had ascertained it himself, and a mistaken feeling of gratitude added to her self-delusion on the subject of Gilbert Ferrers' love.

It appeared to him that two journeys were necessary. Troublesome, to be sure, they were; but he counted the cost, and found the possible results so remunerative that he did not hesitate about taking them. The first was to Ireland, and should that prove as conclusive of his previous information as he thought it would, the second would be to Schlagstein. But it was no use to start for Ireland for a few days, because the Earl's death having taken place so lately, nothing could well be known of the disposition of his property until after the funeral.

It was unlucky; for he had a few days just at his command, which he might not be able to spare so conveniently at another time. There was little or nothing to do at Blunt's and Co. Half the clerks were at the seaside, and the

other half were drawing caricatures on their blotting-paper, or writing sonnets; a metre, and method of killing time, which had become fashionable, with the introduction of the French collar, pockets, and bears. As the latter were very properly forbidden in the banking house, the former flourished to a terrible extent.

Blunt and Company, too, usually took a holiday about this time, with the exception of a fashionable junior, who had married an Earl's daughter, and professed to take his holidays in the hunting season, which had not yet commenced. So that Gilbert Ferrers, occupying a situation of great responsibility, was expected to superintend business during the absence of the chiefs. Just now he could have been spared; but if they once took to Brighton, or the partridges, he would find it difficult to leave London. Altogether he was bored considerably, for, as the reader will see, he wanted information which was somewhat difficult to get without his own personal superintendence.

The intelligence of Lord Fitzcourthope's death was forwarded to Germany. It produced a profound sensation in Myra Gray. She re-

membered the tall distinguished-looking man, who so often rode with her as a child, as she then considered herself, and who now signed himself her "sincere friend, Henry Deloraine." But Henry Deloraine had made no impression on Myra Gray beyond that of a very kind and very condescending friend of her guardian's family. Lady Honoria had not written. It was so immediately scarcely to be expected that she would. But Deloraine had written at some length, promising to give her the particulars in detail after the funeral. There was no mention of a home for her in England. It was clear he could not offer her one himself; nor could he well do so in the house of another person. He had, indeed, told her of his conversation with Lord Fitzcourthope as to the possibility of her living with an aunt in the west of England; but as she knew nothing of this lady, she made up her mind to remain for the present with Mrs. Montessor. Schlagstein was pleasant enough for her; and though she did not contemplate remaining in Germany beyond the next six months, for that time, till her affairs were settled, it might be her home.

Myra was of a very affectionate disposition, and could not regard her late guardian's death but as a very painful severance of long and close ties. He had been the only parent she had ever known. His house had been her home, and a very happy one. Her resting-place, as a child, had been his bosom. All her little sorrows had been poured out to him. Of all the household she had really loved him best, and now she sorrowed unaffectedly over his loss. But that sorrow was not what it would have been eighteen months before. It had been modified by long absence, and by the fatal attachment she had so sedulously cultivated for Gilbert Ferrers. The very hope or expectation of return to England in the following spring had been as much, nay, far more, enlivened by the opportunity of writing herself to her lover, than by the longings for her former home. Hers were not now the pleasures of memory, but of new hope; and her greatest enemy would have been Lord Fitzcourthope and his family, could she have foreseen the strenuous opposition which would have been made to such a marriage. And, indeed, the fact of her own

suspensions of such opposition tended to weaken, though not to deaden, her regrets.

"Mathilde," said Myra Gray, some three weeks or a month after the intelligence had reached her, "there will be no harm in my answering Gilbert's letters now."

"Have you felt that there was harm in it hitherto?" inquired Mathilde; for it was not a delicacy that would have occurred to her, though her moral sense was sufficiently acute to show her that it would act upon a well-regulated and feminine mind. She had done her best, with some success, to blunt the edge of such perceptions.

"Yes; I think I have." And Myra blushed as she said so. "I think I have. Lady Honoria would not have done it, nor Catherine."

Mathilde laughed a slighting laugh. "I did not know that the Ladies Honoria and Catherine were considered models for your imitation."

"Honoria was cold to me, and unkind, when Lord Fitzcourthope petted me." And here Myra's voice trembled at the recollection of his kindness, and two or three tears ran over; for it

was just one of those reminiscences which time had not yet repressed; "but they would not have done so, I feel sure."

"You don't know the world, Myra; unless in your country they love and wed by the rule of three."

"I could have loved him as well, Mathilde. And he would have known it."

"He strikes me as a person who would have been difficult to convince; but you know him better than I."

"Ah, I see. You think we cannot love, because we are unwilling to declare it. He has no right to find fault. All that I have now, if he wants it, may be his."

"But you would not tell him so. Perhaps you are right." The truth being, that as Mathilde saw the success of her own teaching about to be realised, she began to realise the pain which its consummation would bring to herself. In one moment she saw, what a woman of less indomitable spirit might have felt, that she had begun a *rôle* which scarcely a woman in a million could play out. She did not like to own to herself that she wished Myra Gray

might prove a bait too insignificant for the purpose of her paramour, and that her guardian's death might scatter his plans, and her own previous schemes, to the wind. She was not afraid of Myra Gray's attractions; but she was very much afraid of Gilbert Ferrers' necessities, and now she began to repent, and to hope anew. He could not marry a beggar.

She was very soon to be undeceived.

"No, Mathilde, I was not right. I have done wrong. But now I need no concealment. I shall be my own mistress, and when Mr. Deloraine writes to me again, I shall be able to act openly by him, and, I think, a generous part by Gilbert." At that moment the door opened, and Miss Gray was summoned to the presence of Mrs. Montessor.

Mrs. Montessor was as stately as usual, and received Myra with that artificial grandeur and kindness—for they were both artificial—which she had taught people to believe was the essence of English good-breeding. She could be vulgar, for she was so in mind, but she was never so in manner before her pupils. If she had been sent back to England, among her

husband's relations and her own connections, she would have thrown off the restraint of the *pension*, and indulged in the *gaucheries* of middle life with the best of them. But she was a clever woman, with great natural advantages, wholly superior to her bringing up; I forbear to call it education; and here her self-interest demanded the part she was playing. She was the queen of genteel comedy, and would as easily have become the over-dressed roisterer of a less exalted economy, if it suited her purpose. Her dress, her house, her brains, her duty, was—herself. A very clever and very self-interested woman was Mrs. Montessor.

“Miss Gray,” said she, coming to meet her, and then seeing something like sadness, “Myra, you are still suffering.” And she took both her hands instead of one. “You feel your loss acutely. Fortunate indeed that I have a home to offer you here. Temporary absence is so much better for you.” *Me* she meant, but substituted *you*, as more conventional.

“Oh, no, Mrs. Montessor. I feel very well. A word or two upset me for a minute. I’m

sure I'm very much obliged by your offer just now. Indeed, I have no means of returning to England."

"Means!" thought the ex-purser and book-seller. "She can't mean money." Her mind, however, was not so elastic as a minute before; for she might be extending her hospitality to one who really stood in need of it. Perhaps it would be as well to clear it up, which she did in few words. Wasting (for it might have been wasting, and the risk of doing so is culpable) no more time in affectionate yearnings, and only enacting the very formally well-bred superior, she drew from her apron pocket a letter. "I have received letters from England, and enclosed is one for you." Myra Gray took it, and holding it in her hand, said, "Thank you;" but she did not break the seal. Mrs. Montessor thought it desirable that she should do so, and would be guided in her movements by the contents of her letter.

"Don't you think it might be desirable to ascertain what future plans are proposed to you, my dear Miss Gray? Don't think of inconveniencing yourself," for Myra was about to

retreat. "I'm going out for half an hour; use this room, and I will return." So Mrs. Montessor went out, and Myra read.

"Mathilde, do you know anything of your pupil's plans? Is she going to England or to remain here?" said the lady-superior, catching Mathilde unreasonably near the door, and leading her out into the garden.

"That depends upon you, I think, madame. Do you wish to get rid of her?"

"That depends upon circumstances. What do you think?"

"You'd better keep her, unless you want her room for the young Baroness Comorn, who was to come here for a twelvemonth of Signor Strummelfinger, the music-master."

"I see—so! I think the Baroness Comorn can be elsewhere accommodated."

Upon her return to the room Myra Gray told her as much as she desired to know. She was her own mistress, and though two homes were offered to her, she should prefer waiting until the spring before making her choice. Would Mrs. Montessor tell her the easiest means of getting over an immediate supply of money,

as her guardian had desired that she might have everything she wanted, and she wanted a great many things? Mrs. Montessor, we may be sure, was not slow to offer her any accommodation in her power, and it was not difficult to settle the means by which remittances should be made. So Myra accepted Mrs. Montessor's temporary loan, went out, and returned with handsome presents for the young Countesses and Baronesses, not forgetting to give the very best of her offerings to Mrs. Montessor and Mathilde. The secret she told to Mathilde that night of her independence, of her modest fortune, and her determination to do what she liked with it, convinced that lady that it would be desirable to keep her near them; so, without breaking the confidence reposed in her, Mathilde let the superior know just enough to whet her appetite for a longer and closer intimacy with her. They agreed that indulgence would be good for her, and they set to work accordingly. Old Madame de Horsemann told her the truth. "You're a good girl, Myra, and I shall be sorry to lose you; but you'd better go back to your own country. You're too well off to be left to

yourself, and you'll be sure here to fall into worse hands even than your own."

But Myra minded none of these things; for had she not heard that Gilbert Ferrers was coming abroad soon, even this autumn? And this was true; for had not he by some means or other heard the news?

Before the reader closes this chapter he may as well know how; for it was by a simple but curious process, as far as coincidence is concerned.

Gilbert's object in inquiring immediately about Myra Gray's money, the way it was left, in what securities, its real value, how available, and how far she was to have the control over it, was a sinister one. He could not well wait to see by the ordinary light of Doctors' Commons. He wanted to know now, and he wanted to find out without other persons being made as wise as himself.

An extraordinary chance happened to him; and if men are said to have the luck of the d——l, the prosperity of the wicked must stand godfather to the sentiment. Gilbert Ferrers had been bemoaning his hard fate, and wonder-

ing how much longer old Blunt would enjoy looking at the little Blunts making mud-pies at the sea-side, or young Pickham be burning powder on Garside or Ben Grubboch, without effect, when one morning the senior partner came up to town for the day.

Among the letters to be opened was one which of course escaped comment, almost notice, in the mass of correspondence which was being opened, until as it was about to be torn open, the word "private" on the envelope dismissed it to the banker's private room, at the back of the public offices. It was in no wise remarkable, excepting that on inspection it proved to be from Galway, with a thin border of black, and sealed with a coat of arms in black wax. There was enough of the gentleman about it to distinguish it from the mass of official documents, by which provincial saliva was carried from the country to London every morning. Gilbert Ferrers turned it upside and down, and could make no heads nor tails of it at all. It was no hand that he knew, and beyond the fact that it was new to him he cared nothing about it. In ten minutes he

was hard at work, or apparently so, and had already forgotten its existence.

About eleven or twelve o'clock Gilbert Ferrers, who worked in a square box, railed and curtained off from vulgar observation, but yet not so closely veiled as to forget that he was human, which he might have done had he been a partner, a clerk came to him and told him that Mr. Blunt, senior, was come to London, and would be glad to see him in the back parlour. Of course he went at once.

Mr. Blunt expressed his pleasure at seeing him, hoped he had not been inconvenienced by overwork, and that he would soon be able to get his holiday. Last year he had been abroad, would he try the Continent again, or Ireland? Ireland was a charming country now, he had been assured. The hotels were quite respectable, and the roads almost clear of robbers and murderers—in the daytime.

Mr. Ferrers was glad to hear it. He knew something of Ireland. But not being a process-server, he thought he might bring back his scalp if he went there.

“And talking of Ireland, Mr. Ferrers, we .

have a communication here, which in my partner's absence and my own, we must ask you to attend to."

Gilbert Ferrers in the house of Blunt and Co. was no longer the *insouciant* dandy of Piccadilly. He was as handsome as ever, but he was sober, intelligent, quiet, and deferential.

"Anything I could do for the firm, in addition to my ordinary work, I should be most happy to undertake." He thought it right to let them know that he knew what was official and what was not, and that extra services had their value.

Mr. Blunt, senior, was a fat man, of slow perception, but he saw this, and replied, "Not extra-ordinary work, Mr. Ferrers, but requiring more delicacy than belongs to the general run of our clerks. Our firm would unanimously select you for your—your—superior ability."

Mr. Gilbert Ferrers bowed deferentially, and again intimated his willingness to be of service.

"We have received a letter from a new client, unknown to us even by name. It is from Ireland." The private letter, thought Gilbert,

but he did not say so. "The writer proposes to throw into our hands a small account for a young lady now on the Continent. We are to receive under that gentleman's instructions the dividends and rents payable from various securities."

"From Ireland? There's more security there, I think you said, than formerly."

"Ah! just so—and these are, or appear to be, undeniable," said the banker, without a smile. Mr. Blunt never joked himself, and seldom saw one.

"Now I must hand over this business to you to report upon."

"Then a journey will probably be necessary?"

"Possibly—for we should like to be assured of the genuine nature of the property."

"May I ask for what information you have?"

"Certainly. It is an accumulation of about ten or twelve thousand pounds, to be realised at once from the estate of Lord Fitzcourthope, who is lately dead, in favour of a lady who appears to have been his ward or *protégée*." Here old Blunt looked, with intention, at Gilbert Ferrers, who returned his look with

much stolidity. He would not see Blunt's joke this time.

"The relationship of the lady with the noble family in question does not appear. The gentleman from whom we have received this commission is a Mr. Deloraine, of Mount Rasselas, in the county of Galway; and for some reason he wishes the transaction to pass through our hands." Gilbert Ferrers remained without any expression of surprise.

"And the name and circumstances of the lady?"

"A Miss Myra Gray, at present resident in Schlagstein."

"And what power is the lady herself to possess over the property, sir? Is it hers absolutely or in the interest only?"

"The letter is private; but, as a matter of business, you should know that it is hers absolutely on her attaining her twenty-first birthday, or on her marriage, which seems hampered with no conditions. Will you do me the favour to ascertain how far these facts are authentic? You can be spared shortly for a journey to Ireland."

"I don't think the journey to Ireland will be necessary. I know something of this business, and of Mr. Deloraine."

"Bless me, Mr. Ferrers—and of Miss Gray?"

"And of Miss Gray," said Gilbert Ferrers, with the most unmoved countenance.

"I believe you know everybody, Mr. Ferrers. This is most fortunate."

"I'm glad my knowledge is of service to you. And the journey; can I be spared this autumn?"

"I thought the journey to Ireland was unnecessary."

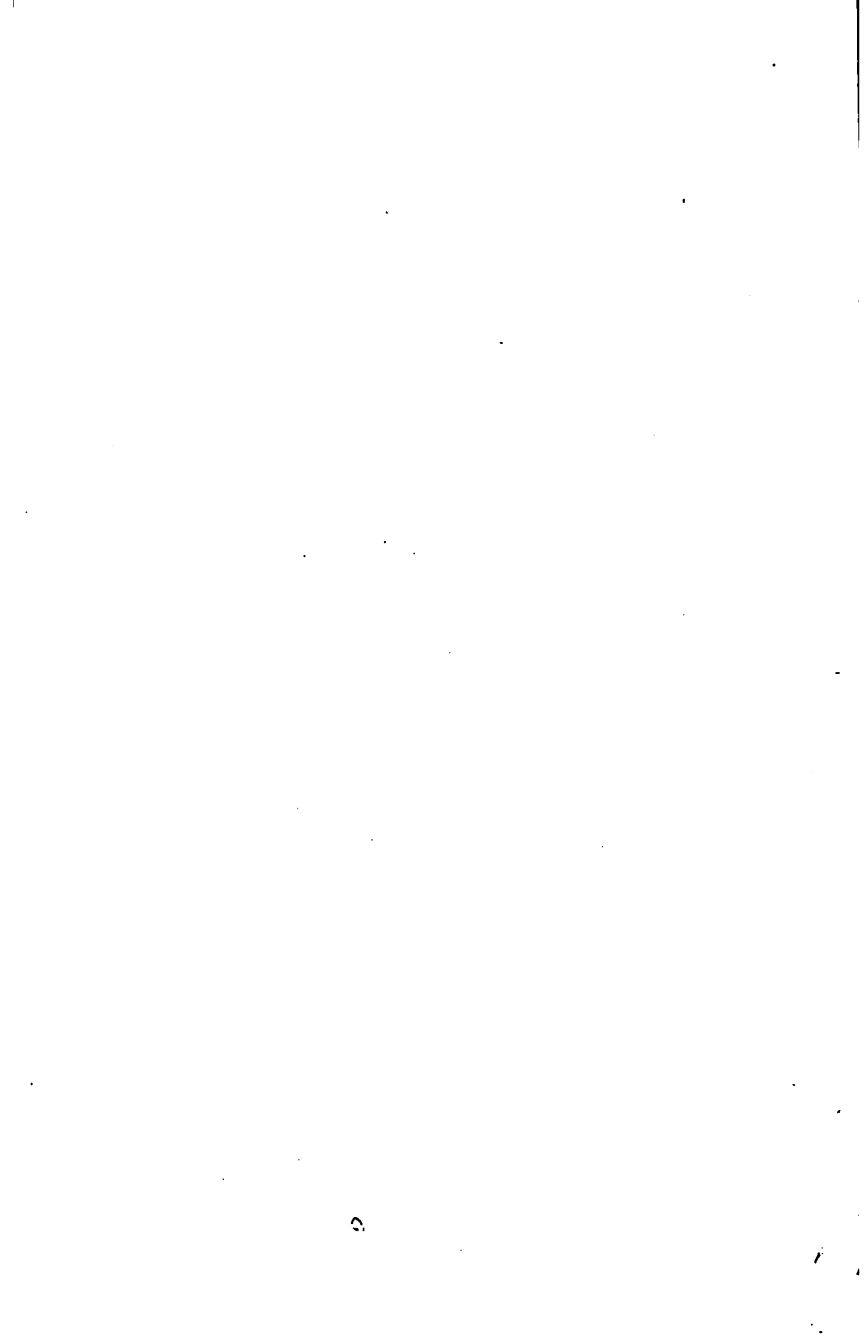
"I propose to make my autumn trip into Germany."

"Certainly, sir. Your zeal in our service shall not be forgotten." Saying which Mr. Blunt gave Gilbert Ferrers a list of the securities from which it was proposed to raise Miss Gray's legacy, and left him with an affectionate salutation.

Gilbert returned to his desk a wiser and by no means a sadder man; but how the coincidence had occurred he was as yet ignorant. Let us enlighten him.

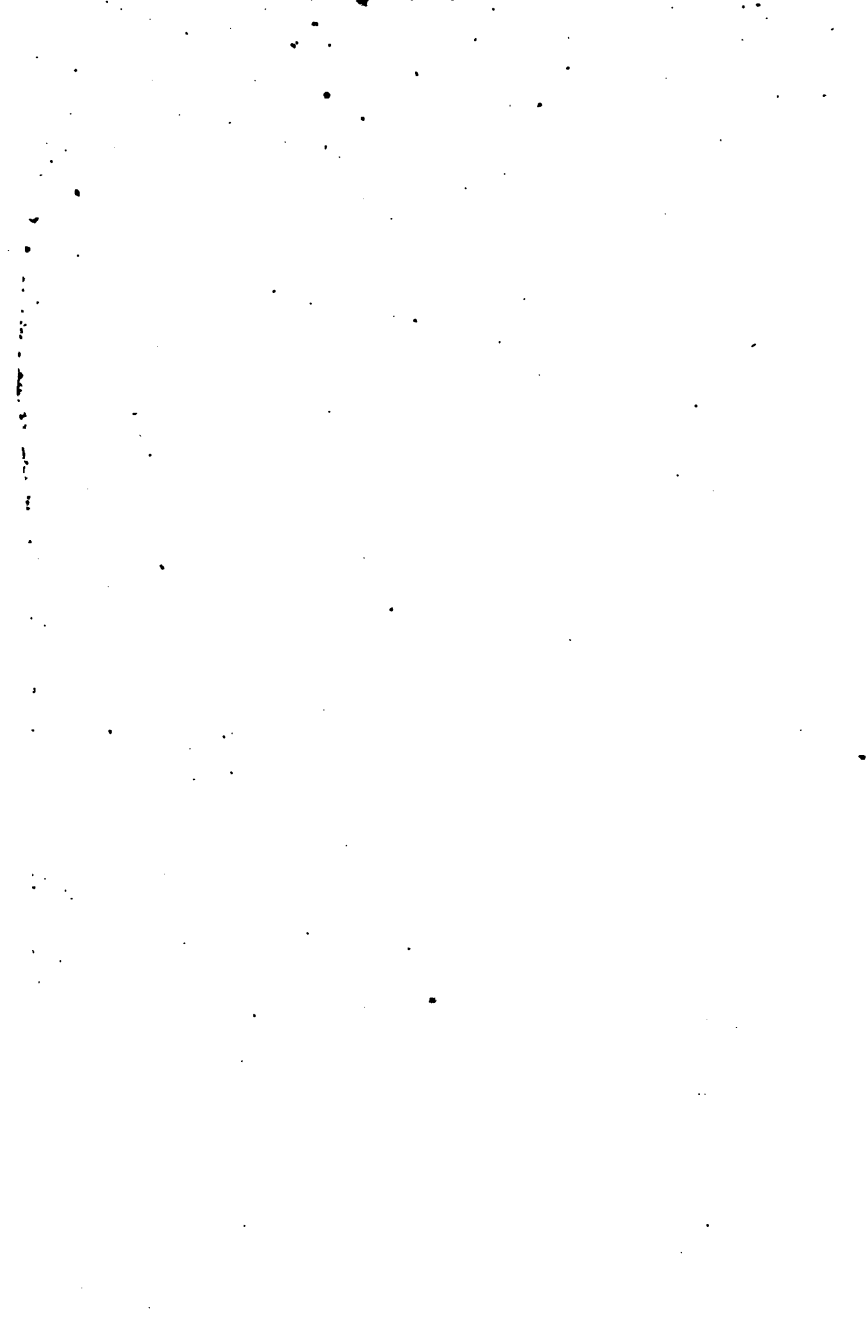
Myra had been applied to by Mr. Deloraine to know whether she had any one, banker or agent, to whom she would like the transfer made. In his mind it was a matter of form, and he only anticipated the natural reply that no one could be more acceptable than himself. Myra had asked Mathilde to whom she should confide such untold wealth, and she had recommended the great house of Blunt and Co., as safe and honest beyond a shadow of suspicion.

END OF VOL. I.











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